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FRANÇOIS DE SALES

1567—1622

BY

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INTRODUCTION

For three centuries the Spiritual Letters of S. François de Sales have held the admiration of readers differing in type so widely as to include Mme. du Deffand and Père Grou. Yet among English folk there are some who are more familiar with his name than with the circumstances of his life.

In the history that treats this world's affairs his place is inconspicuous: certainly he cannot be counted among political ecclesiastics, although political events—rivalries and struggles between contending states and the treaties that resulted—concerned him closely. And in the domain of letters his protest that his vocation as a bishop disqualified him for position as an author had its support in fact. It is true, of course, that his books are famous wherever there are Christian readers, and that he did his part in retrieving sobriety in the use of words from the havoc of Renaissance licence, yet so devoted was he in the direct work for souls which each day brought to him that, even when he most hungered for expression, he kept his pen to the service of individuals and much he had purposed writing for the world remained unwritten. As a priest and as a bishop he laboured for the Church, giving without reserve of all he had, yet he wrought no sensational transformation; when his diocese passed to his successor there were shadows and blots within its borders, parishes neglected by unworthy priests and monasteries peopled by discontented monks.

Thus it becomes clear that it is not the catalogue of his achievements which gives him eminence among the greatest figures of his age. That place is his because he was a saint. Living, as he did, under incessant pressure of affairs, so taxed

by claims on time and thought and sympathy that hours of silence or withdrawal were unattainable, he learnt in the last years to fix his heart immovably upon the Love of God. And if, as may have been, only a few had marked how swiftly he progressed along the way of holiness, a supremely holy death made the degree of his attainment manifest to all men.

It is the purpose of this little book to follow him through the succeeding stages of his life from childhood onwards. We see him as the eager student in Paris and in Padua ; as a mission priest in the Chablais ; as a bishop ardent in the shepherding of souls ; and so, along a way of many trials beset by uncertainty and disappointment and privation ; until he reached the point where questions of failure and success lose their significance, and we strive to catch a glimpse of the mind of the contemplative and to see with his eyes the meaning of indifference.

What I have written is based upon his Works and Correspondence, and for this reason no reference has been made to his miracles or to supernatural manifestations that concern him. My intention in writing is to set down the impression of S. François that has come to me after diligent seeking for nearer knowledge of him. The result is, necessarily, inadequate to the possibilities of the subject.

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1577. First Communion.
1580. Education in Paris.
1586. Returns to Savoy.
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1592. Returns to Savoy.
1593. Ordained Priest.
1594. Volunteers for mission to Calvinists.
1595. Writes Controversial Leaflets.
1598. Devotion of the Forty Hours in Thonon.
1599 Visits Rome.
1600 Publication of his first book.
1602. Visits Paris. Consecrated Bishop at Church in Thorens.
1603. Preaches Lent in Annecy.
1604. ,, ,, ,, Dijon. First meeting with Ste. Chantal.
1605. ,, ,, ,, La Roche.
1606 ,, ,, ,, Chambéry.
1607. ,, ,, ,, Annecy.
1608. ,, ,, ,, Rumilly

1609. Publication of " Introduction to Devout Life."

1610. Foundation of the Order of the Visitation in Annecy.

1612. Preaches Lent at Chambéry.

1615. First Branch House of the Visitation founded at Lyons.

1616. Publication of the " Treatise on the Love of God."

1617. Preaches Lent and Advent at Grenoble.

1618. Preaches Lent at Grenoble. Joins Embassy to Paris.

1619. Appointed Almoner to the Princess of Piedmont. Returns to Annecy.

1620. Preaches Lent and Advent in Annecy.

1622. Death at Lyons.

Beatified, December 28, 1661.

Canonised, April 19, 1665, under Pope Alexander VII.

PART I

THE LABOURS OF A LIFETIME

S. FRANÇOIS DE SALES

PART I

CHAPTER I

At Home and at School

The Castle of Sales stood a little to the east of the mountain village of Thorens. To the child François, who made a playground of its terraces, the varied beauty of Savoy was so continually presented that the abiding gloriousness of nature remained the background of all the visions and problems of later life. There is more hope of approach to understanding of the mind of François de Sales if due regard be paid to the impressions of his early years, and it is interesting to remember that, during his childhood, he was the only child of a noble house, and that his home was one of the great castles where thirty or forty servants lived at their master's cost and did his bidding.

The family of Sales is of such ancient nobility that its origin is hidden in recordless ages. In the eleventh century a member of it, at the Court of Rudolf III of Burgundy, is described as being of high and noble lineage, and by the sixteenth their position was immovably established. In 1504 François, Seigneur de Nouvelles, married Françoise de Sionnas, heiress of La Thuille and of Boisy, and thenceforward was known by this latter title. On August 21, 1567, a child was born to them at the Castle of Sales, and baptised the following day at the church in Thorens, receiving the name of François Bonaventure. The second name commemorates the eager hopes and longings of his

mother and the special blessing which she connected with their fulfilment.

She had reason for this sense of special blessing. In July of the previous year,[1] as part of the celebration of the marriage between the Duke of Nemours and Anne d'Este, the Sacred Relic kept at Chambéry had been transferred to the old collegiate church of Notre Dame at Annecy. Thorens lies about thirteen miles to the north of Annecy, and the family of Sales were bound to be present on occasions of court ceremony, but to Mme. de Boisy the opportunity for prayer under conditions inspiring to special devotion seems to have been more attractive than the state festivities. On her knees in the presence of the Holy Shroud she asked that God would permit her to bear a child, and she joined to her appeal the solemn dedication of her first-born to His service. Mme. de Boisy had a very real part in the life of her son when he came to man's estate ; and the picture of her that tradition paints for us, kneeling in the silence of the privileged church to submit her heart's desire, while the excitement of a gala week thrilled all the world outside, is exactly consistent with later records of her. And in the ensuing months, as devout hope changed to expectant certainty, we are told of her confidence that her son would grow up to be the glory of his generation. Many a young wife not destined to be the mother of a saint has rejoiced in a similar conviction, and no claim to the gift of prophecy can be made on behalf of Françoise de Boisy, yet the story of her relations with her son would hardly be complete without the exalted aspirations of their prelude.

François de Sales, having been born to high estate, was the object of attention and comment even in babyhood, and many stories have survived of his childish piety and self-denial. These are the more convincing because the evidence of one or two misdeeds is included with them. For instance, at an age when the nature of a theft is not very clearly understood, he stole a glittering object from the coat of a workman because it pleased his eye—and bore the subsequent punishment inflicted by his father. Again, a

[1] The date, often incorrectly given, is now established by the Registers of the Municipal Council.

love of new-baked sweetmeats drew him to the castle kitchen, although it was forbidden ground, and when the cook, not without malice, placed a cake straight from the oven in his hand, his greed inspired him with fortitude to bear the pain. It may be accepted, therefore, that he had a share in the failings of a normal child, and that he had also a capacity for sturdy truth-telling.

Certainly life began for him under happy auspices. He was the eldest of his father's family, the plans for his education were not checked by questions of expense, and he displayed a precocious desire for learning. Noting the child's keen intelligence, M. de Boisy sent him at the age of six, in charge of a tutor, M. Jean Déage, to the neighbouring town of La Roche, that he might have the companionship of other boys in study. It is recorded that, at an earlier age, he promised his nurse the most beautiful gown he could buy when he grew up, if she would only teach him there and then to read. So we may assume that he went off to school willingly, and we are told that as a reward for his diligence M. de Boisy went over frequently to La Roche and brought him back to the petting and applause of his proud mother. It is pleasant to picture the handsome, manly child riding beside his father through the amazing beauties of that country-side, eager and joyous over his new life, yet not less keen in anticipation of the welcome awaiting him at home. At all times the bonds that united him to his mother were very close, but that first experiment in independence may have given him his earliest understanding of his need of her.

François had two years of easy schooling at La Roche, and then, owing to the strained relations between the Dukes of Nemours and Savoy, M. de Boisy decided to remove from Sales to the Castle of Brens in the Chablais, and there to form a joint household with his brother Louis. The chief advantage of La Roche as a centre of learning had been its proximity to Thorens, and Brens, which stood in a part of the country where Protestant influence was rife, offered no facilities for education. Therefore François, at the age of eight, took a further step on the path of independence and was sent to Annecy. His three cousins, the sons of Louis

de Sales, were already established as pupils at the College,[1] and with one of them he began an enduring friendship. His schooldays seem to have been exceptionally happy, and tradition says that his schoolfellows recognised in him a saintliness foreign to schoolboy experience and yet accepted him as a leader. No doubt his personal charm served him, for strictness of speech and conduct in a boy is not easily forgiven by other boys. His strictness was only towards himself, however, for his sympathy appears to have been given to any of his companions who had made themselves liable to punishment ; and it was not of a forbidding type, for he had noticeable skill in securing well-fitting clothes and in wearing them well.

All the evidence concerning his schooldays shows his association with Annecy from the first to have been happy ; and the fact that they were spent there had very practical bearing on his after-life. For the little city by the lake was destined to be the background of his life-work, and its people gave him their love and confidence the more readily because he had grown up in their midst and won their hearts long before the solemn prospect of his future had revealed itself. He learnt there also to regard the Protestant revolt as the great disaster in the history of Christendom, and began early to see that his privilege as a Catholic involved a claim for service and loyalty. The pretensions of Calvin were not easily forgotten by those who dwelt in the Chablais, and he returned to the Castle of Brens, in that district, for his holidays ; moreover, though it might be rare to meet with a Protestant in Annecy, the ecclesiastical conditions there must have served, even to a schoolboy, as a constant reminder of the numbers and the strength of the Reformers.

The use of the Church of S. François as a cathedral for the Bishop of Geneva was only recent ; it had been requisitioned by Bishop Ange Justiniani, who refused to comply with the decision of his predecessors that exile from Geneva involved exile from the diocese. In 1634 Bishop Pierre de la Baume fled from Geneva before the menace of the

[1] Founded in 1549 by Eustace Chappens, Canon of Geneva. The building is now part of the barracks of S. Dominic.

Genevese Protestants, and for forty years his sheep were shepherdless. It was left to Justiniani, a native of Genoa, to break this unhappy tradition and thereby to render an inestimable benefit to the people of Savoy ; and it is fitting that there should have been momentary touch between him and François de Sales. In December 1577 the children of Annecy were brought to him in the church of the Dominicans[1] for confirmation ; and François, who had just been allowed to make his first Communion, was among them.

The reminiscences of those who knew him in early childhood suggest that even then the religious bias of his mind was evident ; and it may be assumed that the Communion made at ten years old deepened the tendency towards devotion. We find him, in the autumn of the following year, admitted to clerk's orders at his own strong desire. He seems to have had no difficulty in obtaining his father's consent to this step, which in fact expressed his own dawning realisation of his vocation to the priesthood ; but it should be remembered that to receive the tonsure made him eligible, under certain conditions, for a share in the Church's wealth, and even a pious parent had no scruple in obtaining provision for his son from that source, if opportunity offered. François, at eleven, already cherished aspirations which touched his heart too nearly to be shared, yet in after years he confessed that he had not entered on the path of his secret choice without sacrifice. The schoolboy noted among his companions for his neat and well-fitting clothes wore his hair after the fashion of the time—flowing over his shoulders in luxuriant curls. These must be cropped before he could receive the tonsure, and he owned that it cost him a sharp pang to submit them to the scissors. Doubtless he became the more fixed in his intention because this preliminary offering was asked of him.

In 1582 this first period of his connection with Annecy came to an end and his father sent him to Paris. The sons of noble families in Savoy ordinarily congregated at the College of Navarre, and this would have been François' destination if he had not protested against it. The fact that he did so is an indication that the firmness of purpose,

[1] Now dedicated to S. Maurice.

which later bore down such formidable resistance, had already developed and had made him watchful as well as combative. Before he could decide that the College of Navarre was not suited to his needs and could suggest the Jesuit College of Clermont as an alternative he must have made independent inquiry as to existing conditions in Paris. And he did so as a schoolboy of thirteen who had never left Savoy. He declared that he should lose his soul if he went to the College of Navarre, and might save it under the guidance of the Jesuits, and his father yielded.

Mme. de Boisy seems to have intervened with the plea that the Jesuits were reputed to give individual teaching to their pupils; and Paris was too far away for any of those concerned to be aware of the sole objection to the plan. In fact the students of Clermont were debarred from taking a doctor's degree at the University of Paris.[1] Loyola himself had obtained Letters Patent from Henri II to establish a College,[2] but the opposition was of that kind before which royal authority is powerless, for University and Parliament joined forces that they might bar the way against intrusion. The Society owed the success of their enterprise, at least in a measure, to the disastrous conditions under which Paris was groaning. The misery of the Valois rule and the dissensions that resulted from it had made the capital unpopular as a seat of learning. Teachers of great renown preferred to fix themselves wherever they had most prospect of tranquillity. They were not bound to any town or country; wherever they went they were followed by the students from all parts of Europe who desired to profit by their scholarship, and thus the ambulant character of the University system of the period would seem to have been inevitable. In 1563, when the College of Clermont was opened,[3] the tide had set definitely away from Paris and there was no inducement for a great scholar to establish himself there.

The keenness of vision that has so often been demon-

[1] Fouqueray, H., *Hist. de la Compagnie de Jésus en France*, i. p. 572.

[2] A legacy from Guillaume de Prat, Bishop of Clermont, provided cost of building. Prat, *Maldonat et l'Université de Paris.*

[3] On the site of the present Lycée Louis-le-Grand.

strated in the direction of the Jesuit Society was particularly evident in their use of this opportunity. As a body they had already acquired a great reputation for learning and, under obedience, the most distinguished scholars among them went to Paris. The College of Clermont stood very near the Sorbonne, and when it was known that Maldonat was to lecture all the real students left in the capital were drawn thither.

Maldonat, Spanish by origin and the close friend and follower of Rodriguez, was a man of vast learning and of enlightened mind, and the fact that Clermont did not join forces with the University in fighting a losing battle against the Renaissance influence in all its forms, may be attributed to him. He had the wisdom to recognise that a great change had actually taken place in the conditions of thought, that it was useless either to combat or to ignore it, but that it might be adapted to a righteous use. François de Sales may be said to have come under his influence although they had no personal intercourse, for Clermont remained what he had made it, and it was there undoubtedly that the young student from remote Annecy became imbued with that spirit of the new age which is so evident in his later writings. For François de Sales is the child of the Renaissance. He loved imagery and subtleties of phrase as Montaigne loved them, and it is probable that he had read the Essays (they appeared in 1580) at an age when they were especially likely to make a deep impression on him. He would have won renown as a writer and as an evangelist without those years in Paris, yet their impress rests on each succeeding stage of his career. Scholar and gentleman by disposition and by birth, he was perfected by the advantages so lavishly bestowed upon him, and, when eventually he entered on his high vocation, he brought to it the grace of manner and cultivated judgment which were intended for his equipment as diplomatist and statesman.

It is greatly to be deplored that no letters to his parents written during his six years' absence have survived. All intimate knowledge of him depends on reminiscence, his own and that of others, and must inevitably be coloured by later developments. As regards his outward conditions

we have sufficient detail. He lived, as was customary for the students of noble birth, independent of College authority, lodging at the Hôtel de la Rose Blanche, which looked on to that great thoroughfare of monks and students, the rue S. Jacques. His tutor, M. Déage, who had been with him at La Roche and at Annecy, continued to hold the same office in Paris, and one at least of his servants, Georges Rolland, had followed him from Brens. He lived as befitted his rank, and the doors of many great houses were open to him, the most notable being the Hôtel de Mercœur, where he had his first experience of the Court. In accordance with his father's wish he danced and fenced and rode, and seemed to give himself wholeheartedly to sport and study, yet the while his mind remained alert for all that Paris—even in her days of decadence—spread out before him. It was in Paris, assuredly, and during that early sojourn there, that he learnt to recognise realities in life which for him were no part of personal experience; and so acquired that power of vision which is so precious an asset to the guide of souls.

The duties of tutor to a student who needed no urging were not unduly onerous, and M. Déage found sufficient leisure to follow a course of theology at the Sorbonne. This suggested to François that he might use the same opportunity, and after his first year in rhetoric he pleaded to be allowed to add theology to his other subjects. As his tutor was a priest, the directors of his education Jesuits, and his father lived some hundreds of miles away, it was not likely that such a plea would be refused, and indeed certain notebooks which still exist suggest that his method of working gave him a fair claim on indulgence. But it is hard to believe that the form in which he desired indulgence did not reveal his secret aspirations to some of those who watched over him, even if there had been no other evidence. In fact the sense of his vocation seems to have affected his whole life. He heard Mass every day, he made Confession and received the Blessed Sacrament each week. He joined the Confraternity of the Blessed Virgin which had been established among the Clermont students, and in process of time he became its leader. An hour's leisure meant to him an hour in which to take refuge in a church and pray,

for the craving for a close approach to God had, even then, become his chief preoccupation. And there is no trace of any human influence deliberately applied to urge him forward; he guarded his secret very strictly, and among his comrades he appeared as the heir of a noble house in training to bear its honours worthily, when they should fall to him.

There must have been, among the difficulties of those years, a sense of revolt against the many claims of work and interest that had no bearing on his secret preparation; and this personal sense gained force from the witness of the life around him, where the impulse of self-surrender was already beginning to glow in unexpected places, foreshadowing the great revival of the coming century. The sensational withdrawal of Henri de Joyeuse, the favourite companion of the King, within the Capuchin monastery of the rue S. Honoré, stirred the society about the Court, evoking sharp dismay; and we know that the young student at Clermont was affected by the thought of it and took pains to be at a Mass where Frère Ange de Joyeuse was to serve.[1] That fact, slight in itself, suggests the incessant conflict of interior purpose with outward seeming, and indeed he lived under conditions of such abnormal strain that in due course he paid the penalty. Great depression, taking a form that has tortured many a devout soul, came first; he believed that he had forfeited redemptive grace and that hell awaited him. His days were darkened by this horror for six months, and his physical health gave way; if he had not kept a habit of self-discipline from childhood he would have abandoned himself to illness; instead, he continued his usual routine, and through it found deliverance. His favourite place for prayer was the church of S. Etienne des Grés near to his College buildings, and in accordance with his rule he went there to kneel before a certain stone statue of Our Lady. Close at hand was a tablet engraved with a well-known prayer to the Blessed Virgin. Having (in the

[1] Nicolas de Hauteville in his study of François de Sales (published 1661), p. 27, says: "l'exemple du Père Ange de Joyeux servit d'un très puissant motif à notre Bienheureux, pour se donner, si nous ne disons mieux pour s'immoler à la Mortification."

words of Père de la Rivière) "declared his sorrows, beseeching her earnestly to deliver him from so sharp an affliction as that which he suffered," he offered this prayer with all the fervour and devotion of which he was capable, making at the same time a vow of chastity, and pledging himself to say the Chaplet every day for the rest of his life. "In a moment his health of mind and body returned to him, and, as he many times related, it seemed to him during his prayer before this Sacred Figure that he felt something like the scales of leprosy fall away from him." [1]

Naturally he became more eager in devout practice after this experience, and he brought new purpose to his diligence in learning. Thenceforward he classified his notes, keeping special books for all the knowledge he could gather under the heading "Service to souls." [2] He took pains also to hear the well-known preachers of the day and, although there can have been little edification to be derived from most of them, he may have taken warning that was of service in the future from some of the specimens of pulpit oratory presented in the Paris churches. There were some preachers, and these probably the most sincere, who could not be diverted from polemics and filled their discourses with fiery denunciation of Protestant error,[3] leaving no space for any attempt to awaken penitence in sinners or to exhort the faithful to good works. Others, desirous of reputation, yielded themselves to the exaggerated pedantry which won applause from the fashionable world, but served no spiritual purpose whatsoever. The young student, whose destiny it was to hold the listening throng in these same Paris churches, watched and observed, and, when his own time came, he turned his observations to the profit of his hearers.

Ambition in the ordinary sense does not seem at any stage to have had much hold upon him; and he bore no grudge to the University of Paris because it did not grant him a degree. He was allowed six years to learn all that Paris offered to his eager intelligence, and then M. de Boisy recalled him.

[1] La Rivière, *Vie de l'illustrissime François de Sales*, pp. 35–6.
[2] Gonthier et Letourneau, *Vie*, p. 62
[3] *Cf.* Urbain, C., *Nicolas Coeffeteau*, 1574–1623, p. 136.

In 1586 the whole realm of France was so menaced by civil war that student life in the capital involved more than reasonable risk, and perhaps his mother became urgent for his return; whatever the reason for it the command admitted no dispute, and September 1586 saw the close of a most important chapter in his life. Mind and spirit had been enriched in Paris, and he looked back on his years there with gratitude; yet home was dear to him, and he hastened back with joy to the eager welcome that awaited him at the Castle of Brens.

CHAPTER II

The Strength of Vocation

There is an element of tragedy in the relations between François de Sales and his father which has not been sufficiently recognised by his biographers. M. de Boisy married late in life and was thirty years older than his bride. His youth was spent at the Court of the Duke of Nemours, and the complicated relations between the Houses of Nemours and Savoy checked his career as soldier or as statesman. At forty he withdrew into private life and settled down on his estate of Sales, his ambition remaining dormant until the brilliant qualities of his first-born rekindled it. Once revived, it soared higher and higher, and on behalf of François M. de Boisy set no limit to his dreams. It is satisfactory to know that no shadow of disappointment clouded that important hour in October 1586 when M. Déage and his pupil arrived at the Castle of Brens.

There were now many younger children, and this eldest brother, who, to some of them, was no more than a name, received a very warm welcome. Their parents were happier and home-life far more exhilarating by reason of his coming. For François was unfailingly gentle to those about him. He told Père de la Rivière that gentleness had not come to him by nature, he had acquired it at considerable cost, and perhaps he had done so because the lack of it in M. Déage and in M. de Boisy was so disturbingly apparent. It may be due to his precocious self-discipline that the many sons of the house of Sales did not grow up to be a quarrelsome company, for it is evident that he found rough places that needed smoothing even then. He received nothing save adoring devotion from his brother Louis, it was Jean-François whose natural temper did not tend to peace.

François described the situation quaintly and a little ruefully. "Between the three of us we should make admirable salad dressing," he said. "Jean-François stands for good vinegar, he is so decided; Louis for salt, he has so much good sense; and poor old François is a worthy fellow who will serve as oil, he is so set on smoothing." The oil proved a valuable addition to the compound of family life. Nineteen years later he noted with intense appreciation the harmony that reigned in the home of his race. "There is concord among elements that are ordinarily so antagonistic," he wrote,[1]—"mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, brothers and brothers-in-law. . . There is here only one heart and one mind."

He was specially responsible for the harmony in the Castle of Sales in the midst of so many possibilities of discord, because at the time of writing each one of the individuals concerned looked to him for spiritual guidance; yet it was in those holiday months of 1586 at the Castle of Brens that, as a boy among other boys, he sowed the seed destined to bring forth such desirable fruit. Assuredly the younger brothers made loud lamentation when the voice of authority announced that François was to go out into the world again, and if Mme. de Boisy pleaded that six years in Paris had given him all the learning and accomplishments necessary to fit him to hold his place among his peers, she had reason on her side; few among his contemporaries could have borne comparison with him either in knowledge or in grace of manner. Such decisions rested with the head of the family, however, and pleadings and lamentations served no purpose.

In the last two decades of the sixteenth century the University of Padua ranked among the leading Universities of Europe, and Padua was selected by M. de Boisy for the final stage of his son's education. Guy Pancirole was lecturing there, and his reputation for knowledge of Roman law attracted students of many differing nations. There are said to have been twenty thousand of them at one time congregated within the city walls, and the citizens found it difficult to maintain their rights against peaceful invasion on so vast a scale. François showed no reluctance in obeying

[1] *Œuvres*, XIII. No. 425, p. 347.

his father's wishes, and seems to have applied himself with enthusiasm to the study of jurisprudence. He was at an age when the prospect of new scenes and experiences presented greater attraction than prolonged residence at the Castle of Brens, and it may be noted that for him Padua offered the possibility of certain advantages which lay altogether outside the calculations of M. de Boisy. That ancient city had been the home of S. Anthony long before it became the favoured resort of doctors learned in the law; and, though religious might be fewer in number than students, they were a more permanent factor in its conditions. There were actually forty monasteries in the vicinity of the tomb of the saint, and such obvious reminders of the possibilities of the devout life could not be ignored altogether, even by youth in its most wayward stage.

The position of François was difficult at this period, and we have nothing that gives us the key to his own view of it. Outwardly obedient and deferential towards his father, he cherished in secret an intention directly opposed to the future prepared for him. Perhaps in the midst of the home circle at Brens, where the head of the family held absolute authority, his own visions lost reality; but with the second plunge into student life, imposed by the kindly despotism that overshadowed him, the question of his vocation became insistent. When he set forth for Padua to study law and so to fit himself for that high place in the Senate of Savoy for which his father destined him, he may seem to have committed himself to acceptance of his father's plans. It must be remembered, however, that such acceptance was taken for granted; the tradition in which he had been trained forbade any questioning of parental right in the matter.

The experience that awaited François in Padua served to intensify his desire for priesthood. He found very little enjoyment in the pleasure of the pleasure-loving, and he maintained a standard of conduct at variance with the code of the world around him. As an inevitable consequence he was unpopular, and anecdotes have survived which show that his fellow-students made elaborate plans to bring him to open downfall and discomfiture. They lured him by

false pretences into a house of ill-fame; they lay in wait to surprise and frighten him in a lonely street. In the one case his real purity of heart preserved him; in the other he emerged triumphant because, to the surprise of his assailants, neither his courage nor his skill as a swordsman was diminished by the devout practices which had kindled such resentment. When they discovered him to be proof against tests of this nature his comrades accepted him for what he was: a being different from themselves and possessed of some secret which altered the values to which they were accustomed; yet a kindly and genial companion for ordinary life and a staunch friend in difficult moments. Such is the general impression to be gleaned from reminiscences of his student days.

This social side, however, was a very small part of what life in Padua meant to François himself, nor was it the wisdom that Maestro Pancirole could instil that most engrossed him. It was to a teacher versed in other learning that he looked to make that time the most fruitful of his period of training. The Jesuit Possevinus, very celebrated in his day both as a scholar and diplomatist, had been teaching theology for a year in Padua when M. Déage and his pupil arrived there, and his presence is important because he was a competent spiritual director. It would appear that now for the first time François laid the inner recesses of his mind open to human scrutiny. Possevinus became confessor to the new student from Savoy, and before long the question on which the future of his penitent depended was laid before him.

The decadence of the clergy in the sixteenth century has been constantly described by historians dealing with Protestant revolt, and members of the religious orders are shown to have been more responsible than the secular clergy for the disaster of the Reformation. The allegations against the priesthood are, ordinarily, too sweeping. There were many examples of holy life within and without the cloister, even at the darkest moments of the Church's history; nevertheless in those dark years that preceded the Catholic Renaissance there was only one direction in which men looked with any confidence of finding help upon the way of righteousness, and that was towards the newly founded

Society of Jesus. That François de Sales had gained some inkling of this fact even as a young schoolboy is proved by his preference for the Jesuit College in Paris; and among Jesuits the reputation of Possevinus stood high, while his experience of public life and of society fitted him specially to deal with a case involving such important issues for so many people. Then, as at all times, a layman whose mind was fixed on God could render illimitable service to the Church if fortune and ability raised him to high place in the State; and the wishes and ambition of M. de Boisy were too weighty to be set aside without very convincing justification. The Jesuit, realising the importance of these considerations, delayed for many months before he would deliver judgment, but when it came it was decisive. After long observation he recognised that the vocation of his penitent was far too deeply rooted for denial; in this young student, destined apparently for so assured a place among the great ones of his nation, he found a reality of devotion and self-surrender that set him apart as one for whom God had special purpose. For the time being he counselled silence, but he lavished time and thought on the preparation of his charge for the responsibilities of the future.[1]

In 1588 the Theatine monk, Lorenzo Scupoli, is supposed to have come to Padua from Venice and to have presented François de Sales with a copy of "The Spiritual Combat." If this was actually the case the visit and the gift fell at an apt moment, and from some source or other the book did certainly come into his hands about this period, for, twenty years later, he averred it had been his constant companion and favourite book of devotion ever since his student days.[2] Close study of his own teaching shows it to be identical in spirit with Scupoli's work, and this although the one is famed for gentleness and the other is notably austere. The teaching of François de Sales, which is peculiarly worthy of close study, has often been accorded only the most superficial

[1] *Cf.* François de Sales à A. Possevin, Oct. 1605: "*Il y avait à Padoue un jeune gentilhomme savoisien M. de Sales; par une faveur singulière vous lui donniez un très libre accès auprès de vous, non seulement dans le Sacrement de Pénitence mais encore dans votre commerce intime.*"—*Œuvres*, XIII. p. 107.

[2] Camus, *Esprit de François de Sales*, Part XIV ch. 16.

type of comment, and thus the legend of his gentleness has gained ground, tending to obscure the searching severity of his methods with those who had courage to submit themselves, as did the nuns at Annecy, to his guidance. He was never so rigorous with others as with himself, however, and of this the Rule of daily life that he followed in Padua is evidence. We are told that Possevinus approved of it, and it may be that he judged it best for his charge to acquire experience for himself. Certainly during these years in Paris and in Padua François gained personal knowledge of the temptation to exaggeration of austerity, and of its dangers. We get some idea of its nature when we learn that in the midst of constant and inevitable duties he found the hours of the day inadequate for the keeping of his Rule, and so curtailed the space for sleep. And in addition there were night watches and discipline and fast, and the hair-shirt worn on Fridays. He seems to have been entirely indifferent to the claims of the body, insatiable in desire for mortification, and perhaps we may see in his recklessness the seed of something that was to bear fruit in far distant days. For youth was running riot in Padua. Young men of many nations had congregated there in vast numbers, and no order or discipline could be maintained; and François de Sales might not seek refuge behind monastery walls while he stored his mind with learning. In Padua he had, of necessity, to be aware of sin around him in visible and glaring form, until the sense of sin weighed so heavily upon him that his practices were those of the penitent, although the sin was not his own. His effort came to a prosaic end, however, for a wasting fever threatened to make havoc of all his own schemes for the future and break the hopes cherished by those who loved him.

François accepted the sentence of death which the doctors passed upon him with courage, but not with entire resignation. His ambition was not easier to surrender because it was unworldly. The testamentary dispositions with which he entrusted M. Déage are significant of his state of mind. He possessed nothing in his own right—he said—save soul and body. His soul he commended to God. His body he gave to the medical students of Padua with the

observation that "as it had not been of any use in the world during his life it might thus be made to serve some purpose after his death."[1]

Thus he acknowledged defeat and betrayed that defeat was bitter, for it seemed to him that all his youth had laboured after had eluded him. Perhaps it was only in view of the last Sacraments that he rose to complete surrender; and it was not till he had received them, at a moment when those around him had abandoned hope, that strength returned and he began a swift recovery. And he came back to life with zeal and eagerness undaunted. In the autumn following his illness (September 1591) he took his doctor's degree, and received enthusiastic commendation from Pancirole.

M. de Boisy, overjoyed at the triumphant close of the education over which he had watched with such intense solicitude, gave leave that François should travel in Italy before returning home. The holiday began with a pilgrimage to Loretto, and continued on the grave lines that such an opening foreshadowed. Even in Rome François took little pleasure in social amusements. Then, and on his second visit nine years later, he saw the Eternal City as the home of the Faith, and had no eyes for the evidence of any of those scandals which other travellers delight to chronicle, nor taste for the society of the great nobles and ecclesiastics whose extravagances and intrigues made life one long adventure for their associates. Because he lived, in some measure, under false pretences, he was the more resolute in refusing anything that might divert him from his hidden purpose. During the years in Padua his mind had reached full development, and it was a mind impregnated by the Faith. Moreover, being supremely convinced of a religion that is essentially supernatural, he had no difficulty in accepting any marvel presented to him with the authority of the Church. At Loretto he was able, quite simply, to find the dwelling of Our Lady, the scene of the Annunciation; in Rome he realised the sanctuary of the Faith, the dwelling-place of the chosen representative of Christ, a city made holy by the blood of innumerable martyrs.

[1] *Année Sainte*, vol. i. p. 359.

It would be a mistake, however, to picture him passing his days in a condition of undisturbed exaltation. The companionship of M. Déage provided adequate ballast and secured that the ordinary experience of daily life should hold its share of discipline. Possibly the tutor suspected the secret intentions of his charge, and was antagonistic to them, perhaps his anomalous position, as holding authority over one so infinitely superior to himself, disturbed him. Whatever the reason may have been, his temper became difficult. From his childhood François had on occasions suffered ill-treatment from his governor, but petty despotism is harder of toleration by a man of twenty-four than by a schoolboy. The final instance of it is worth recording. On their homeward journey by way of Venice, François' hat was knocked into the sea by the swaying rigging. M. Déage still kept the purse, and his irritation at the loss, and at the carelessness to which he attributed it, was so great that he refused to supply the funds to buy another, remaining unmoved by the notice and mockery lavished on the bare-headed signor in the streets of foreign cities. The possibility of such behaviour suggests that François had brought the practice of forbearance to the point when it became a danger to his neighbour, and the character of M. Déage suffered.

M. de Boisy had removed from Brens to the Castle of La Thuille, at the corner of the lake farthest from the city of Annecy, and here the travellers were anxiously awaited. And if his experiences with M. Déage had taught him patience and detachment, as they were calculated to do, François had reason to be thankful to his tutor's ill-humour, for the ordeal of his first months at home made continual demand on just those qualities. M. de Boisy manifested exuberant pride in his son's success, he settled on him a small estate which carried with it the title of Sieur de Villaroget, he made him known to all the chief personages of the district (among whom was Claude Granier, Bishop of Geneva), and must have appeared to himself and to those about him as the most generous and appreciative of parents. He did not number the gift of sympathy among his many excellent qualities, however, and while he rejoiced over the

glories awaiting his first-born and looked back complacently over the years of youth and boyhood on which so much care had been expended, he never gave a thought to the individual mind and spirit that, throughout those years, had been developing. His eyes were riveted on the Sieur de Villaroget, about to make a triumphant entry into public life, and he could not see the real François, waiting from day to day, under the burden of continual misgivings, for the hour to strike when he must shatter all these golden visions and declare the real mind within him.

In November 1592 François went to Chambéry for the examination required before he could be admitted advocate to the Senate of Savoy. This was the natural sequel to the years in Padua, and for a pupil of Pancirole the examination itself had no terrors, yet it meant a step in a direction which did not lead to his true goal. It is possible that François began to waver in resolution before his father's delighted confidence in the prospect opening out before him. A secret intention, even though it be united with strong personal desire, is hard to maintain against the insistent pressure of home influence and authority. And the extreme importance which he attached to an incident on his return journey from Chambéry implies uncertainty as to the course that lay before him. We must picture him as emerging from surroundings where there had been much to foster vanity with thoughts that were anxious rather than elated. He may have been riding carelessly, and the paths of the Forest of Sonnaz which he was crossing were so overgrown that his horse stumbled and fell. He saw nothing very surprising in the accident, and when in his fall his sword became detached from his belt and he found sword and sheath on the ground in the exact form of a cross, the chance struck him momentarily, but made no great impression. He made the sheath firmer than before and continued his journey. A little later, however, and this time without evident reason, his horse again fell, his sword sheath again became detached, and sword and sheath again lay in the path before him as a cross. When this happened a third time he accepted it as a message which he could not ignore. So vivid was the impression that it unsealed his lips.

"God calls me out of the world," he said to M. Déage, who was with him. "He will have me serve Him as a priest and gather souls beneath the standard of the Cross."

But the tutor had not courage to give support to such a theory, and, indeed, by reporting the successes of the days in Chambéry he added weight to the obstacles already lying in his pupil's path. François did not look for human encouragement, however; the impulse towards the fulfilment of his true vocation had now become absolutely compelling. On his return to La Thuille he declared his purpose to his mother and to Louis de Sales, his cousin and former schoolfellow, now a canon at Annecy. He gave his confidence wisely. His mother, after very brief hesitation, became the warmest of allies, and so firm was her assurance of his power to surmount all barriers that she had a cassock prepared for the moment when he should be free to assume the garb of his chosen calling. Louis de Sales could give aid as well as encouragement: indeed it was his intervention that brought the crisis so long awaited.

Every week that passed after the visit to Chambéry increased the strain and suspense of François' position. The account of his talents and attainments reached the ears of the Duke at Turin, with a result that threatened his projects with disaster, for in the spring there appeared at the Castle of La Thuille an old friend of M. de Boisy, the Baron d'Hermance, the bearer of an intimation that it was the ducal pleasure to nominate François, Sieur de Villaroget, as a member of the Senate of Savoy. This was such remarkable distinction for one so young that M. de Boisy felt his expectations hitherto had hardly done justice to his son's capacities, and he began castle-building on a greater scale. Also the question of a suitable marriage exercised his mind, and he approached the family of a lady who had personal attraction as well as riches. To his surprise and dismay François did not accept this project with his usual docility, and actually showed hesitation in the matter of the Chambéry Senate. These things tried the temper of M. de Boisy, and disturbed that appearance of harmony which ordinarily surrounds a despot, while for his son each day made the situation more difficult to endure.

Deliverance arrived from an unexpected quarter. The Provost, or senior Canon of the Chapter of Geneva in exile at Annecy, had died in the previous October, and Louis de Sales was inspired to use the vacancy for the deliverance of his cousin. Somehow he contrived to enlist the necessary interest without forfeiting secrecy, and obtained from Rome the appointment of the Sieur de Villaroget. In May he appeared at the Castle of La Thuille even as the Baron d'Hermance had appeared two months earlier, with an announcement calculated to astound all whom it might concern. The surprise that the message from the Duke inspired was as nothing beside the sensation caused by the Papal bull. To François it meant that suspense must end immediately. He sought an interview with his father as soon as Louis had proclaimed his errand. The account of it which has survived was drawn from his own recollections.

"Father, I have come to ask something of you," he said; "if you will grant it me I will never ask anything of you again."

So completely had M. de Boisy blinded himself that he anticipated a project of marriage which might be disadvantageous to the family fortunes. On this account he gave a guarded answer. And François, deciding that the blow must be struck without delay, told him of the arrival of Louis de Sales, of the reason of his journey, and of his own overwhelming wish to be a priest.

In that moment the hopes that M. de Boisy had been cherishing for twenty-five years were shattered. The violence of the shock was due to the supreme confidence in his own judgment which had made any reference to the ideas of others appear superfluous; but for him the position was not on this account any the less tragic. Just because François had been dutiful and obedient all his life his father recognised the finality of this decision. It was vain to urge that so tremendous a change could not be made without reflection; that an eldest son had a duty to the old age of his parents; that the honours awaiting the Sieur de Villaroget in that way of life for which he had been trained were of far more importance than the office which he now appeared so eager to accept. Throughout the ebullition

of anger and disappointment François had waited in silence for the conclusion which both knew to be inevitable. From the first moment in that trial of wills that of the younger man had shown itself the stronger, and when the first flow of violent words had spent itself, he stated his case with all his habitual respect. He showed the long development of purpose that lay behind the choice that seemed so sudden, and the special points at which events had strengthened it. Especially he emphasised the recent incident in the Forest of Sonnaz. This had made so profound an impression on him that after it he never wavered in assurance that God was on the side of his desires. In the years to come, over and over again, he convinced and dominated others by the force of his own conviction, but it never sustained him in a sharper contest than that which was waged in the Castle of La Thuille on the May morning when his career began. He fought for the desire of his soul against the self-love and baffled ambition and wounded sensibility of the old man who held first claim on his obedience, and he won. That same afternoon saw him on his way to present the Papal nomination to the Vicar-General at Annecy, and by so doing to pledge himself irrevocably to the service of the Church. The next day, May 13, 1593,[1] he put aside sword and doublet and all vanities of secular dress, and appeared in the cassock his mother had prepared for him.

Ever afterwards that date was sacred to him as the anniversary of a great event. Very early he had gone to the Church of La Thuille in the spirit of the postulant to be clothed with the habit of his Order. The parish priest, M. Aimé Bouvard, by whose hand he made Communion, observed that the reception of a Capuchin novice could not have been attended by greater fervour or solemnity. To which François replied that he felt himself to be entering the Order of S. Peter; and it will be seen as we follow him further that this was no light saying: the obligation of the religious could hardly be more searching than that of the secular priest as he regarded it.

We know little of the relations between M. de Boisy

[1] *L'Année Sainte* gives May 10, but the evidence of the Letters is more reliable. See *Œuvres*, XVI. 1073, p. 360.

and his son in the weeks that followed. Consent had been given readily enough fifteen years earlier for that admission to clerk's orders which made possible the sudden metamorphosis of the Sieur de Villaroget ; and perhaps memory of the past gave added bitterness to the present. It cannot be doubted, however, that this was a joyful time to François himself. He was keenly alive to the beauty of nature, and his mood found a seemly setting in the perfection of early summer in Savoy. The load just lifted had, by gradual increase, become almost intolerable, and in the open air, inspired by the song of birds and the springing life of trees and flowers, he could most fittingly give glory to God for his spiritual emancipation.

In fact, however, his freedom from the clutches of the world was less complete than he had pictured. Recovering from the first shock of defeat, M. de Boisy snatched for salvage from the wreckage of his hopes. The nomination to the Senate had not been formally refused and was not incompatible with place in the Cathedral Chapter ; on that foundation the old man began to build new castles, and appealed to François for this concession to his wishes. Refusal stirred him to vehement anger, and he declared that he would not concern himself further with his son's prospects. To that the Sieur de Villaroget replied by formal renunciation of title and estate, and all claims of primogeniture. Thus he entered on his new life untrammelled by possessions.

CHAPTER III

The Provost

Bishop Granier decided that the new Provost should be ordained sub-deacon on Trinity Sunday, just a month after the arrival of the Papal bull. François spent much of the interval in retreat, under the direction of his friend the curé of La Thuille. The time was short, but it was only the last stage of the secret training he had begun in boyhood, and M. Bouvard recorded that he found him as familiar with his breviary as a priest of many years' standing.

The little world of Annecy had been swift to recognise the touch of the inevitable in the announcement that had seemed at first to be sensational; and the reception accorded to the Provost on the day of Ordination went far to reconcile even M. de Boisy to the destruction of his plans. A dinner was given at the episcopal residence, and the Bishop made no secret of his view that the event of the day should evoke widespread rejoicing. His expression of opinion was emphasised by his invitation to the new-made deacon to preach from the Cathedral pulpit at the approaching festival of Corpus Christi. Actually François de Sales faced this ordeal a week later, and we are told that his heart failed him when the moment came. Too much depended on the proof of his capacity as a preacher for him to meet the test with calm. He had relied upon this means of imbuing others with a share in his own conviction that in his recent choice he had obeyed the voice of God, and natural fears of unreadiness assailed him. And so panic threatened and he needed all he had learnt of self-restraint to keep it in abeyance. Possibly that first sermon, preached before those who had known him from his childhood, owed a part of its success to the struggle it had cost him. When he

forgot himself and the surroundings that were so weighted with familiarity, inspiration came, and from that time forth his preaching won recognition as a strong force on the side of righteousness in that suffering diocese of Geneva.

With heresy so rampant on all sides the Faith needed strong champions; and Annecy itself, despite certain devout traditions, showed little tendency to ardour in affairs that concerned the Church. Bishop Granier, who had carried out many reforms at his first coming, had failed in health, and the Cathedral Chapter, demoralised perhaps by exile, were not an awakening influence in the city that gave them hospitality. If, in after years, François de Sales went back in memory to the months when he ministered as deacon in his Cathedral city, we may conjecture that his memories stirred in him the sense of humour. For his zeal had been given such immediate expression that after his coming the church-goers of Annecy were never allowed to rest in the tranquil customs that hitherto had satisfied their pastors; at once his brain and imagination had been set to work to find the fittest means of stirring them to effort. Not that activity in him began and ended with the desire to be active; if that had been the case the changes that he wrought could not have lasted. Instead, the motive of all he did was evident, for in him even the unenlightened could recognise a man whose whole being was aflame with the love of God, and whose sole desire was to wake in human souls a blaze of fervour in correspondence with his own.

In Padua and also in Paris he must have been familiar with talk of the Calvinist heresy, but the vast importance of the subject and all its many implications was brought home to him when he came to Annecy as never before. And it seemed to him that reflection on the Protestant revolt should be as a trumpet-summons to the faithful. It was for them, by their prayers and penance, to make reparation for the offences of their brethren. From this idea sprang his scheme for a Confraternity of Penitents of the Holy Cross. It had a twofold purpose: the vitalising of the spiritual power in those around him and the organisation of a spiritual force to combat the work of the Devil as shown in the spread of heresy. The Rule, drawn up by

himself, testifies to his enthusiasm and also, in some degree, to his youth. Besides practical directions for good works it claimed a great deal of outward observance from its members. Three times a day at the sound of the Angelus each one was to kneel with bared head wherever he might chance to be, and no day must pass without the saying of five *paters* and five *aves* in honour of the Five Wounds of Jesus. On a fixed day in every month the Confraternity was pledged to Corporate Communion in the Church of S. John the Baptist, and on these days its members were to maintain a watch before the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the High Altar. There were further details, but these leading points implied so constant a reminder of the obligation of a faithful Catholic that by them his object was achieved.

His zeal did not betray him into self-sufficiency; he took counsel with many who by age and experience were qualified to judge of the scheme itself and all that pertained to it. No doubt the fact of its inception must have roused resentment if anyone except this astonishing young Provost had been responsible. In his company, however, no one could take offence, and his simplicity and confidence in the goodwill of all whom he addressed disarmed his critics. Probably he owed the support and friendliness of his colleagues in these early days in part to his personality; but the effectiveness of the Confraternity in stimulating the spiritual life of Annecy was due as much to skill as to his personal charm. Already he showed that he had the instinct and the vision of one born to deal with souls. If he had asked only a little, fearing too violent a challenge of the habit of somnolence, the awakening of those who heard his summons might have been only partial; but in the name of the Church he made a great demand, claiming it as a right, and the people responded eagerly.

In September, barely four months after his ordination, the Constitutions of the Confraternity were registered with general approval, and the people of Chambéry, at the instigation of the Senator Antoine Favre, established another body under the same Rule among themselves. The success of his idea could not be attributed to mere love of novelty:

rather it had the character of a movement long awaited, and, to all those who welcomed it, François de Sales became a spiritual leader even before he had been ordained priest. In May 1594, less than a year after it came into being, the Confraternity had grown to such dimensions that it could venture on a demonstration of its strength and importance, and a pilgrimage to Aix was organised. The two sections from Annecy and Chambéry were to meet in the Church of the Holy Cross, having performed the last stage of their journey barefoot. This pilgrimage was a notable event in the religious life of the diocese. Besides serving its primary object of stimulating devotion it promoted a sense of fellowship among the like-minded, and the leaders of the two contingents profited themselves by the opportunity they were offering to others.

At this point we touch the beginning of a great friendship which held important place in the history of François de Sales. In his years of uncertainty he dared not give his confidence to any of his contemporaries, and only after his return to Savoy, at the end of his period of education, did he experience for the first time the delight of an intimacy arising from mutual attraction and owing nothing to ties of blood or forced association. On his visit to Chambéry, in November 1592, he had been provided with a letter of introduction to the Senator Antoine Favre, but circumstances prevented a meeting until a much later date. It appears, however, that Favre had kept watchful eyes on the career of the student of Padua who was proving himself so worthy a representative of the nobility of Savoy, and had intended to welcome him as a valuable colleague. When the events of May 1593 made this impossible, he offered to the newly appointed Provost the friendship he had destined for the Senator. The Latin correspondence between them is artificial and pedantic and contains no suggestion of the depth and reality of their future alliance, nevertheless it served its purpose as a means of approach, for on the eve of his ordination, when François de Sales found his burden of misgiving too heavy to be borne alone, it was to this unfamiliar friend that he turned for sympathy.

"I have never before been so troubled," he wrote; "fear

and trembling have taken hold upon me. . . . I have always known that overwhelming responsibility is part of this great and holy dignity, but distance dims our vision and the thing we see at close quarters is very different from what it seemed when a long way off. . . . There is no one who seems to me so likely as yourself to understand my distress." [1]

Two months later Antoine Favre and François de Sales met face to face and, during a few days spent together at the Castle of Sales, the alliance, destined to be so precious to them both, was established on a firm basis. It was then that they laid their plans for the enterprise of the following May, when, under their joint leadership, the Confraternities of Annecy and Chambéry united in devotion before the Sacred Relic at Aix.

The young Provost was ordained priest December 18, 1593, and the agony of his misgivings gave place to the peace of God that came to him. He said his first Mass in the Cathedral at Annecy on the feast of S. Thomas. The three intervening days were passed in retreat, and he felt the profit of them to have been so great that, sixteen years later, when he urged the importance of retreat on the Sisters of the Visitation, he used this experience as an example.[2] And the resolve with which his retreat culminated strikes the note to which he attuned his after-life; thenceforward it was to be his continual endeavour to make every moment of every day part of his preparation for the next morning's Mass.

As a deacon he had been able to infuse a new spirit into the religious routine of the little world around him, and, with the new force of his priesthood deepening his influence, he became as a glowing light to the many groping souls whose desire for righteousness had not been stirred until he came among them. At once it was recognised that he had been endowed with the gifts that are fitting to a guide for souls. It was left for his experiences in Paris and in Dijon to reveal the fullness of his genius in this direction, yet it is clear that his power declared itself as soon as his ministry began. In February 1594, when he had been a priest barely two months, he was appointed *grand pénitencier*

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. 13, p. 37. [2] *Année Sainte*, xii. p. 372.

at the Cathedral, which meant that the chief responsibility for the administration of the Sacrament of Penance devolved upon him. He gave his mornings to this service, and if tradition speaks truly, he brought the Faith to the poor of Annecy in a guise of which they had never dreamed. Those whom the world shunned—the ragged, the diseased, all the most wretched who crossed the threshold of the House of God with faltering steps—found him awaiting them, ready for each with the patient tenderness which was the reflection of his real mind towards them and not a product of self-mastery. When, eight years later, it became clear that Annecy was to be the centre of his labours, he had a confessional erected at his own expense by the south entrance of the Cathedral.[1] This is not a place of honour, and his choice was regarded as derogatory to the dignity of his office. Remonstrances were quite unavailing, however. "The Shepherd should be at the door to call the sheep into the fold," he said. Thus gradually the minds of the most ignorant, the most fearful, and the most ashamed were penetrated with the thought of love and mercy as within reach of all who sought for it, and his confessional drew souls as does a magnet.

"Those who came to kneel before him with any honest intention," says an old chronicler,[2] "did not rise from their knees without having learnt a real loathing of vice and a true longing after holiness."

There is stronger evidence of the sanctity of this young priest, however, than can be obtained from reports of the behaviour of an unknown throng. So plainly did his life bear testimony to the truth of his vocation that M. de Boisy capitulated, and having joined the Confraternity of the Holy Cross, was numbered among the penitents of its Director. And following this example the rest of the family and household at Sales, not excepting Mme. de Boisy, submitted themselves to the spiritual guidance of the son of the house, whose conduct, in all its ordinary and unconsidered details, was so familiar to them. A higher testimony than this to the consistent holiness of his life is not imaginable.

[1] *Année Sainte*, xii. p. 33.

[2] La Rivière, *op. cit.*

As the inhabitants of Annecy were of the same nature as other human beings, the success of the new Provost did not continue very long before jealous tongues began to suggest that his methods and his motives were less admirable than they appeared. Criticism was rife especially among those who, having hitherto enjoyed the intimate confidence of the Bishop, became fearful lest they should be ousted by a new-comer. Middle-aged mediocrity is predisposed against the innovations of enthusiastic youth; and some of the veterans of the Cathedral Chapter may really have believed the rumours that were spreading. It was said that François de Sales had deliberate purpose in eclipsing them; that he talked with contempt of the conditions that prevailed before his coming; that he proposed to be in future the power that ruled behind the Bishop's throne. The Chapter of Geneva living in exile had a good deal of leisure, and it does not appear that any of them were serious students; therefore they had abundance of time in which to discuss a topic of this kind, and vague suggestions grew into the serious charges which came eventually to the ears of Bishop Granier. By that time so many minds reflected these suspicions that the Bishop allowed his own personal impressions to be overruled by the force of combined opinion, and the confidence that he had given so freely was entirely withdrawn.

François made no attempt to defend himself when the disapproval of the Bishop became manifest. It was plain that the diocese needed the work he had inaugurated, and the individual claims upon him were unceasing; and so he continued on the path he had chosen, giving the same faithful service as before. And the Bishop observed and waited, and at length defied the advice of all his counsellors and contrived to see the accused alone. Pacing the walks of his private garden with the object of suspicion at his side, he satisfied himself that his first impression held and the young Provost had just the simplicity and singleness of purpose he had descried in him. In the future François was to suffer on many occasions from the work of malicious tongues, but with Bishop Granier his position could not be assailed again, and thenceforward the work of each gained

strength from their certainty of mutual confidence. And the work of the Provost prospered exceedingly; even his enemies could not deny that his sermons were welcomed by the people in Annecy and the surrounding country. They were asked for very frequently. A letter to Antoine Favre[1] records his inability to preach on special occasions without reference to books, but he could speak to the people with whose spiritual needs he was familiar almost spontaneously, and he gave without stint of all he had. By so doing (as years afterwards he described to his friend Bishop Camus) he aroused the disapproval of his father.

"Provost, you preach too often," said M. de Boisy; "daily I hear the bell ringing for sermon and always I am told: it is the Provost! The Provost! It was not so in my day. Sermons were much less frequent. But then what sermons! What wisdom! What learning! What splendour of language! There was more Latin and Greek in any one of them than in ten of yours put together; the whole world was entranced and edified; the people came in crowds as though to gather manna. You make your preaching so common that neither you nor it will be of much account."

François never allowed the claim of filial deference to bear upon his life as a priest, and this remonstrance did not lessen the readiness of his response to all the demands upon him, although it may have recalled his experience of the popular orators in the Paris churches and reminded him that his method was not the one approved by the great world. In fact, this matter of his preaching gives far-reaching indications of his outlook and his purpose. When after many years of patient aspiration God had fulfilled the desire of his heart and he became a priest, he saw the Faith as the one source of happiness for all mankind, and the conversion of souls as the one endeavour worthy to engross all his own powers of heart and brain. His intention of charity was so sincere that it helped him to understand other minds and to realise temptations and doubts and causes of quarrel quite foreign to his personal experience. He had broken through many formidable barriers that he might be a priest, and having achieved his purpose he would allow

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. 12, p. 32.

no tradition of social and intellectual inequality to separate him from his people. The homily, the type of sermon he adopted, had long been out of vogue, but he saw it as the form in which he could approach those ordinary folk for whom he knew himself to have a message, and so, in all simplicity, he used it, although he jeopardised his reputation as a preacher and caused fresh disappointment to his father. M. de Boisy believed that congregations would weary of intimate and familiar preaching, and sermons on these lines would cease to find an audience ; and there was no opportunity to convince him of his error, for the removal of the preacher to another sphere of labour took place before the theory could be tested.

It was a period when religious controversy and questions of international politics were deplorably interwoven, and the young Provost at Annecy was destined to discover that public affairs had as close a bearing on his way of life as if he had followed the lines laid down for him and been a Senator at Chambéry. In 1593 the Duke Charles Emmanuel of Savoy withdrew the pledge of toleration given to his Protestant subjects in the Chablais, and, to show that his acceptance of heresy had been of necessity and never of choice, he expressed a desire for a mission, with Thonon for its centre, to win back the inhabitants of the district to the Church. Bishop Granier, although prompt in compliance, was very insufficiently informed of the conditions of the enterprise. His first emissary, M. Bochut, had no qualifications for the task and, after reconnoitring the position, beat a retreat to a safer quarter of the diocese. This very inauspicious opening delayed any further venture for some months, and eventually Bishop Granier summoned his Chapter at Annecy, laid the whole question open before them, with all the loss and discredit to the Church involved in it, and called for volunteers. As he did so he was well aware that only one of those who listened possessed the exceptional gifts the office needed, and he could least be spared from the place he held. The Provost had the right to speak next after the Bishop, and he used his privilege that he might be the first to volunteer. Probably all those present anticipated that he would do so, for he had lived in

their midst more than a year, and even those who were most ready to misjudge him could not remain entirely ignorant of his character. Also, as his power of initiative was responsible for many of their grievances against him, the assembled canons must have welcomed a plan that gave a fresh field for its exercise; so none of his colleagues raised any protest when his offer was accepted, and only one of them, his cousin Louis de Sales, followed his lead and expressed a wish to share in his quest for souls in the Chablais.

The lethargy of that assembly cannot be excused on the plea that its members were incapable of effective service. To the exiled Chapter of Geneva the evils of schism had been manifested in very practical form, the larger part of the diocese being so far dominated by the Calvinists that a Catholic who proclaimed his Faith did so at risk of life as well as property. Moreover the Protestant heresy appeared—in the eyes of the Catholics of Savoy—to emanate straight from the devil, and although it was to fight this devil that volunteers were urgently required, the canons of the Cathedral at Annecy did not volunteer. Perhaps their efforts to achieve resignation had made them pessimistic, and in their experience the fortunes of war had always been on the side of the Calvinists. Certainly they were all possessed of more age and experience than their Provost, and so they were content with expressing their approval when, with an enthusiasm equal to that of a soldier by vocation summoned to active service, he grasped at the opportunity of leading an attack.

None could question his qualifications for the mission. A sermon preached at Seyssel, very soon after he was ordained priest, confounded the rulers of that very Protestant locality, and he had shown them that his personal charm won access to minds which were closed against the ordinary type of controversialist. Also there were ties of blood and friendship between his family and many of the notable inhabitants of the Chablais which were likely to prove of no small value to the leader of such an invasion as he contemplated.

Yet many of the considerations that seemed eminently in favour of his going added to the reluctance with which

Bishop Granier gave him the appointment. Just those qualities that might help him to success in the Chablais made his presence in Annecy invaluable; and his social position, though it might prove a support among the Protestant nobility, complicated the preliminaries with which the Bishop had to deal. For it was quite clear that so distinguished a personage as François de Sales would not be allowed to undertake so dangerous a task without loud protests from his kindred. The news of his appointment flew to Thorens swiftly, and as soon as a horse could be brought round M. de Boisy was in the saddle, and on his way to Annecy. Tradition has preserved an account of the dramatic scene in the episcopal residence at Annecy that ensued. M. de Boisy expressed with vehemence his indignation at the attempt to rob him of his son, and the Bishop's suggestion that he should emulate Abraham in generosity of sacrifice only added fuel to the fire. Probably he was more violent because in his inmost being he knew that expostulations on such a point were certain to be useless; François, the priest, having shown already that parental authority had no further place in the ordering of his life.

And again at this point M. de Boisy has a fair claim upon compassion. It had been at the cost of a severe struggle that he yielded his son to the Church, and the surrender had been made with real generosity. On the strength of it he had been able once more to see this son as the pride and support of his old age, and, when once more the foundation on which he had built collapsed, he did not lack excuse for his resentment. Having spoken his mind without producing any effect he took horse again and returned to Thorens. His next move is tragic in its futility, for his dignity forbade another personal protest, and in place of it he sent his closest friend M. de Lullin to reiterate the expression of his unqualified disapproval. And even M. de Lullin failed him. Naturally the envoy approached the subject with a detachment impossible to the principal, and was convinced by the quiet purpose of the young Provost that justice was on the other side. He returned to Thorens only to congratulate the indignant father on the honour of possessing such a son. The distinction between

obstinacy and firmness is never an easy one to fix, and it is not wonderful that the old man's judgment should have been twisted by the sharpness of his pain ; yet in looking back, when those dark hours had passed, he must have seen that François could only have obeyed him by defying the honourable tradition of his race. As well might a soldier, having volunteered for a perilous adventure, draw back on the plea that his father was fearful for his safety.

The two missionaries did not require much time for preparation. Louis de Sales shared in his cousin's eagerness, and as soon as the official papers could be made ready for them they stayed only for the Bishop's blessing and set forth from Annecy. In François the thirst for souls had already become a passion ; already after nine months of priesthood the values of home and kindred and familiar things had to be readjusted, and his heart was so set upon his future task that he could spare no backward glances of regret. Only because the Castle of Sales lay on the road to the Chablais did he halt there, his object being to spend two days in retreat and to make a life confession rather than to take leave of his family. He found his mother ready to speed him on his way with a courage and faith equal to his own, and as his father had retired to La Thuille to avoid a meeting there was nothing that disturbed his preparation. When it was completed he did not linger, and very early in the morning, September 14, 1594, he and his kinsman Louis de Sales set out on foot for Thonon.

CHAPTER IV

The Mission Priest

The road that led the two missionaries forth on their great adventure had been very familiar to François in his childhood. For miles of the forest way that mounted gradually upwards they could hear the gurgling of the river in the valley to their right as it flowed towards Thorens and the Castle of Sales; and when at length the crest of the ridge was reached and they looked down on the flat country that stretches from La Roche to the border of the lake of Geneva, the prospect may well have carried François back in memory over the twenty years dividing him from that first journey to La Roche which gave him the schoolboy's claim to independence. And if, to the mind of the little boy as he emerged from babyhood, that prospect had symbolised the world of new experience on which he was about to enter, so, to the same imagination in maturity, the same plain as it stretched below was the symbol of the far-reaching possibilities of the future. And, in fact, at this later stage, even more truly than in the childish days, he stood on the threshold of a new life.

It is hard to estimate the importance of the Mission to the Chablais in the career of François de Sales. We shall see that the experiences awaiting him were of such a kind that the most insensible of beings could hardly have passed through them unaffected, and that they brought his qualities of mind and spirit to a swift development. A passage in a letter written the previous August suggests the tenor of his thoughts, after a year of ministry. He wrote:[1] "It is easy for any Christian to follow Jesus Christ while He

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. 31, p. 85.

heals the sick and raises the dead, it is only the very few who keep close to Him in His own suffering and dying."

At that time his own labour was fruitful; no hint of his future call had been given; and, actually, when he left the well-trodden path on which his feet were set for a steep and uncertain track, he did so with the most sanguine hopes. The importance of the adventure to the Church and to the people in Savoy loomed so large as to exclude thought of its relation to himself, nor indeed could any calculation have foretold how far he was to go on the way of suffering and dying. In fact, the ordeal is of no less consequence to his spiritual history than to his visible career, for it is legitimate to trace the understanding of human wavering and feebleness which later gave him such supreme capacity as a guide of souls, to the searching experience of loneliness and failure and persistent disappointment which lay before him then. That he should grow in prudence, in self-control, and in the capacity for affairs was the natural result of so independent a mission, and of his constant dealing with all sorts and conditions of men, and his progress on these lines need not be emphasised: it was not in his busy and business-like moments, but in flat intervals when all effort for past or future seemed unavailing, that he touched the reality of desolation needful for advance. At a further stage of spiritual ascent there are indications that he had knowledge of the darkness which sooner or later envelopes the soul of the contemplative, but only here did he have full human experience of the complete discouragement that points towards despair.

We know that if any shadow of foreboding approached either of the two missionaries, on that long march from Thorens to the plain of the Chablais, they had faith and courage to defend them from its chill influence. By the bridge over the Boringe, which marked one limit of the territory they had come to conquer, we are told that they halted to kneel and pray once more for a blessing on their enterprise. When they continued their journey and left Catholic Savoy behind, they did not enter a strange country; they knew their surroundings well, for they were near the Castle of Brens, and this with the estate surrounding it

belonged to Louis de Sales ; but the sight of a familiar face was no longer assurance of a friendly greeting. Geneva had laid firm hold on the Chablais, and its inhabitants were instructed to regard a priest from Catholic Annecy as an enemy. Only when they had tramped across the plain for another seven miles and climbed the steep ascent to the fortress of Allinges could they have any expectation of a welcome. When they passed beneath the castle gateway they left hostility behind, for the Baron d'Hermance commanded the Catholic garrison and he had every reason to receive them warmly. Apart from their claim on him as envoys of the Duke of Savoy he had ties of family friendship with them both, and had played a part in a recent crisis in the history of the young Provost. Also as Governor of the Province he had full sympathy with the object of their coming ; having learnt to regard heresy and disloyalty as synonymous terms, and the conversion of the Chablais from Calvinism as the one hope of securing tranquillity.

It is unlikely that François had given much thought, before his arrival in the Chablais, to the political significance of the work he had undertaken. Neither private ambition nor the instinct of patriotism had part in the enthusiasm that animated him, and he had to learn, by slow degrees and painfully, that other interests besides the love of souls prompted the movements of those whom he regarded as his colleagues in a great spiritual enterprise. At that moment indeed liberty in religion was used as current coin among the rival powers, for the purchase of dominion. Thus, but a few years back, when no Huguenot subject of the Valois was secure of life or of property, the Calvinists of Savoy had looked with confidence to France to protect their right to worship as they pleased.

It was in 1536 that the forces of the Bernese Republic overran the plain south of Lake Geneva, and in the intervening period the peasant population had been absorbed into the ranks of Protestantism. During that intervening period, also, the dukedom of Savoy, to which this territory lawfully belonged, had passed through many vicissitudes, but it had emerged from its darkest time of trial long before the Duke conceived the idea of sending missionaries to his

heretic subjects to persuade them of their errors. Savoy was only a little state hedged in on every side by contending nations, and it behoved its rulers to be prudent; political fluctuations had not made such a step advisable at any earlier moment, and unless there had been good prospect of diplomatic advantage it would never have been taken. Actually the movement was deemed to be premature. In the interest alike of the Church and of the State it had promised well, but it did not develop according to plan, and Charles Emmanuel, discovering the difficulty of combining religious zeal with political prudence, decided that the immediate interest of the State was his first care, and his vision of the great enterprise on which he had summoned missionaries from Annecy to the Chablais grew dim.

Full value should be accorded to the reasonableness of his view and of his conduct, but this did not diminish their tragic import for the missionaries. François de Sales believed Calvinism to be of the devil and that the soul of a heretic was lost unless he submitted to the Church. And because the spirit of charity possessed him, the progress of his mission seemed to him so vital that no human interests should be permitted to impede it. Here lay the source of his deepest suffering. Personal difficulty and hardship, disappointment over results, abuse and opposition from the objects of his solicitude, these things were as nothing compared to the constant menace of desertion by the power on whose support his work depended. It was not the practical result of such uncertainty—great as was the hindrance it entailed—that most affected him. When he embarked upon his mission, with the ardour of his temperament not yet tamed by disillusioning experience, he believed that his fellow-Christians were actuated by the same fire of love and self-devotion as burned in his own breast, and he looked for a response to his own idealism. He looked in vain, and the disappointment wounded his faith in human nature. The thrust went deep, and his new outlook on mankind may be found expressed in his petition for the employment of force to coerce profession of faith, sent to the Duke in December 1595.[1]

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. 63, p. 168.

We should regard him as he is described to us on the morning after his arrival, standing on the terrace of the Castle of Allinges, if we would appreciate the change wrought by the events that followed. Then he looked down on the plain of the Chablais believing that it was his mission to win it for the Church, and that conquest could be achieved by spiritual weapons. As he mourned over the ruined churches his heart was full of yearning charity towards his fellow-countrymen, who had so long been left to grope in the darkness of heresy; and assuredly he would have repudiated the bare suggestion of such measures for dealing with them as he himself recommended a year afterwards. The measures in question were not such as popular sentiment would approve at the present time, yet the difficulty with which he was faced has baffled statesmen and ecclesiastics in every generation, and those who follow him step by step along his course will not be tempted to question his good faith. It is, at the least, a possibility that his conclusion, reached through prayer and experience and thought, may have been the best that the circumstances of that moment offered.

In the days of their inexperience the two missionaries were aided by the advice of the Baron d'Hermance. As he stood beside François on the Castle terrace he tried to convey the magnitude of the task they had undertaken, but he did not do so with any purpose of discouragement. He told him that in seventy parishes, representing thirty thousand souls, there were only a hundred Catholics and of these twenty inhabited the neighbouring town of Thonon; and also that the accounts of Calvinist hostility which had reached Annecy were founded on very real fact. On two points he was insistent: whatever operations his guests might conduct during the day, they must return at night to the protection of the Castle walls; and within the boundaries where the saying of Mass had hitherto been prohibited, Mass must not be said. François agreed to these precautions, on the understanding that in all other details he was free to conduct the campaign as he thought best.

Thonon had been chosen as the centre of operations. It was separated from the village of Allinges, at the foot of the Castle hill, by nearly four miles of lonely road, every

yard of which was destined to become very familiar to François as morning and evening he trudged to and fro. Among the handful of Catholics in Thonon were some of the really faithful, and they had as leader Claude Marin, *procureur fiscal*. His house, in the important quarter of the town, near the church and the market, adjoined one which belonged to Jeanne du Maney, widow of his predecessor in office, Jean Duffoug. The two houses, built at right angles, both had access to the same quiet garden, sequestered from prying and suspicious eyes, and the two proprietors vied with each other in their zeal to promote any effort for the restoration of the Faith in Thonon. Here then, on the property shared by these two, François opened his mission and called on the assembled Catholics to give proof of their courage and their loyalty. This was on a Friday. On the Saturday the two missionaries visited the other households that were well-disposed towards them and explained to them the importance of showing their colours openly. On Sunday, accompanied by the few who had courage for such an enterprise, François entered the parish church of S. Hippolyte as the congregation were about to disperse, and there, mounting to the pulpit just vacated by the Calvinist minister, he began to explain to the assembly that the power and the right to preach belonged exclusively to priests ordained by the authority of the Church.

This was a bold measure. Surprise secured a hearing for him, but, as his meaning dawned on them, the people began to murmur against so uncompromising a defiance of the faith in which they had been nourished. It is plain that he made this sensational beginning with deliberate intention. He meant, in such a way as to arrest attention, to proclaim his position as a Catholic priest and to challenge the credentials of any Calvinist minister. Possibly his faith in the justice of his case was so great that he expected to convince a good proportion of his hearers instantly; but the immediate effects of his experiment tended to increase the strength of the Protestants—their resentment drew them together, and their leaders lost no opportunity of fostering personal indignation against the Catholic missionaries. So violent were the threats against them that tidings of their

danger spread to the Castle of Sales, and M. de Boisy summoned Georges Rolland (the servant and companion of his son's student days) and sent him with a led horse to François. He believed that the written command that his son should return forthwith to Annecy would secure obedience. The attitude maintained by M. de Boisy was a cause of acute suffering to François, yet in so far as he could be so without yielding in principle he was conciliatory. And on this occasion he persuaded his cousin to ride back to Sales with Rolland and to describe the conditions under which they were working, so that the fears of the family might be allayed.

Thus, as the result of his father's expression of anxiety, he found himself left to pursue his perilous course alone. Years afterwards he told Ste. Chantal[1] of the extraordinary delight that came to him during those few days of his cousin's absence, in the sense that in poverty and in real isolation he was called to preach the Kingdom of God to those who had no knowledge of it. It was well for him that he had the capacity of the visionary; if he had faced the facts of the position without it he must have been daunted. The force ranged against him, directed by shrewd intelligence, was very formidable. The martyrdom for which he prepared himself might have discredited his adversaries, and it is probable that only the extreme fanatics plotted against his life. Wiser heads agreed that his spirit should be broken by contempt and ridicule, and orders came from Geneva that these weapons were freely to be used against him. When he preached in the open air, in the market-place of Thonon or elsewhere, the populace were urged to greet him with volleys of mud and stones, so that often he was obliged to fly from the violence of his persecutors; and wherever he went, if a Calvinist recognised him, he heard the murmur of mockery or abuse. Yet his inward vision sustained him, even if hours of exaltation became rare, and the knowledge that loneliness and contumely and disappointment have always been the portion of the chosen followers of Christ remained vivid in his mind.

A natural division of labour took Louis de Sales to the

[1] *Année Sainte*, ix. p. 402.

villages lying in the direction of Geneva, some of which were on the estate of Brens, while François made Thonon his headquarters. The Castle of Marclaz, about equidistant from Allinges and Thonon, represented an oasis in the wilderness of hostility. Here dwelt Charles de Vidonne,[1] a man of sufficient natural force and social distinction to brave the danger of residence in the midst of heretics. He was related to the family of Sales, and gave his support to the mission as whole-heartedly as did the Baron d'Hermance. When the sensational rumours that distracted the Castle of Sales spread to Annecy and to Chambéry, Antoine Favre rode over to Marclaz to discover for himself the risks and the possibilities of the mission. And opinion at Marclaz—which thenceforward became established as the place of conference between François and his friends—encouraged confidence that the risks were fully justified by the possibilities.

Every suggestion of personal encouragement must have been precious, for the recall of Louis de Sales to Annecy indicated the lowering of hope at headquarters, and François would have been completely solitary but for the presence of Georges Rolland, sent from Sales by M. de Boisy to resume his duties as man-servant. Morning and evening in all weathers the desolate road between Thonon and Allinges had to be traversed, and no gleam of promise could be drawn from the efforts expended in Thonon or in its surroundings. Darkness closed in early, and many times François lost his way when endeavouring to strike homewards from some outlying hamlet. He spent one night in a tree as a refuge from the wolves, and another, when the snow fell thickly, in a village bakehouse, because no cottager would give him shelter. And always in darkness there was special danger of attack from paid assassins commissioned by the rulers of Geneva. With these he seems to have had one or two encounters, and to have owed his escape, in part to the impression made by his fearlessness, and in part to the report spread by his enemies that he dealt in black magic and had a bargain with the devil. Such a report drew upon him the execrations of the ignorant and so served the purpose of those with whom it originated, but, by suggesting

[1] Father of Claude de Charmoisy.

that he was immune from ordinary danger, it discouraged any attempt to do him bodily harm and so contributed to his preservation. Perhaps the townsfolk of Thonon hardly needed outward suggestion to persuade them that there was an element of the uncanny in the proceedings of the solitary black-clad figure perpetually reappearing among them. Knowing as they did the strength of Geneva and its hostility towards the message of their unwelcomed visitor, the fact of his survival was mysterious. And those who saw evidence of the supernatural in the perseverance of François de Sales were not in error.

The full cost of this perseverance should be regarded. Neither the Calvinists in Thonon nor their directors in Geneva understood the nature of a priest, and the worst hurt inflicted on this young preacher from Annecy was done unwittingly. The peaceful and well-disposed among those whom he might have reached avoided him because his reported eloquence and his personal attraction made him dangerous; but they did so for their own protection, not realising that this avoidance contained for him the threat of something far more deadly than the bodily hurt with which their more violent brethren menaced him. For the true priest is hungry to win souls, and the priesthood of François was the reason of his being. The Chablaisians were condemning him to starvation when they refused to give him any form of hearing. He preached Advent in the Church of S. Hippolyte at Thonon, but he did so to five listeners, all of whom were professing Catholics already. And it is plain that he had to face the threat of failure. His method of facing it and of repelling the shadows of depression proved his unconquered spirit. For the time being the heretics might repel his ministrations, but when the fruitless effort of the day was over and he returned to the fortress of Allinges he made for himself there a field of productive labour.

The soldiery of that period had an evil reputation, and the soldiers of the Catholic garrisons under the command of Baron d'Hermance did not differ from their kind. On them François exercised the magic with which he was credited. And he was the better able to lay his spell upon

them because their own experience of peril and hardship showed them the true nature of those errands on which he went forth day by day. Also every morning since his coming he had made his offering of the Mass in the Castle chapel, and they were Catholics and knew that he was doing so. Thus in the weeks of mid-winter he prepared the way for the assault he had been planning, and when Lent began, with the sanction of their commander, he preached a series of sermons to the soldiers of the garrison. If we say that he held a mission it is not too great a claim, nor can it be questioned that the mission bore rich fruit. The rough company among whom an unexpected chance had thrown him surrendered to his summons, and if his confidence in his power with souls had wavered they must have restored it to him. It was a surrender that meant far more than a wave of emotional excitement, for during the three years of his charge at Thonon there were claims constantly recurring from the garrison at Allinges that he should preach and hear confessions ; and of one of his penitents there it is recorded that at the close of his term of military service he became a monk.

Doubtless he had more power over that reckless band because of his own personal struggle against impatience and discouragement, waged through those lonely months. It is not fantastic to see, in the first year of the mission to the people of the Chablais, the noviciate through which it was necessary that François should pass to the more fully dedicated life that lay beyond. His life as a priest in Annecy had not in itself been of a kind to teach humility. The actual degree of the testing to which he submitted as a missionary at Thonon may be drawn from his description of his activities in a letter to the Jesuit Possevinus, written in April 1595.[1] He had then reached his seventh month of exile. He had preached constantly, but only three or four of the Calvinists had ever come to listen, and these only rarely and in secret. One or two who, covertly, had had speech with him explained that the likelihood of finding themselves again under the dominion of Geneva was far too great to allow them to consider Catholic reasoning.

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. 48, p. 119.

"This shows the value men set upon security that is of this life only," he comments sadly, "and it is of no avail to challenge it, for to the threat of hell and damnation they oppose the assurance of the loving kindness of God and the least urgency drives them entirely away. . . . When the Faith is held only at such cost it is as much as one can do to keep a hold on Catholics born and bred."

He—to whom nothing but faithfulness was possible—saw here the difficulty of being faithful, and it was this faculty of seeing with the eyes of others which fitted him so supremely for the task he had undertaken. Assuredly more heretics were won for the Church by the patience of François de Sales than by all the eloquence and learning of those who, at a later time, joined forces with him.

There was no promise of any future conquest when he wrote his letter to Possevinus, however, and to bear the present he schooled himself to a grim philosophy foreign to his nature. "Certain of my kinsfolk here and some others," he wrote, "for special reasons have a regard for me which I could not transfer to anyone else, and this is a primary reason for remaining. Before this I should have become very impatient but for my hope of better things, and also that I am well aware the miller is not wasting his time while he is preparing his grindstone. Also, it would be matter for regret that anyone capable of being of use elsewhere should be spending labour here in place of myself, for I am not yet fit to be preacher to anything but bare walls, and that is my part in this town."

The work of preparing the grindstone would have been a labour of love to the miller had he not been forced, in the midst of it, to recognise that there might never be any grist for it to work upon. This it was that made his toil so bitter. The strength of Geneva was patent to all the world, the crown of France had lapsed to a Protestant and, in the event of an alliance between such neighbours, the Duke of Savoy would prefer to forget any measures he had taken to bring his Chablaisian subjects back to the Faith. Meanwhile, he sent no word of encouragement to the missionary nor any pledge of future protection for possible converts, and in the spring of 1595 the omens pointed to a change of policy

that would place the mission-field definitely under Calvinist rule. When that Lent was over François spent a month at Annecy, and on the eve of his return to Thonon he wrote to Antoine Favre in a strain which showed he cherished no illusions regarding the stability of the enterprise on which he had risked so much. "It is commonly believed," he wrote,[1] "that our work is not sanctioned by the prince, and many say, not without warrant, that it is being done against his will. When we depend upon one word from him, his silence argues in their favour."

Favre supplied no encouragement from his intimate knowledge of the political situation; and with the clouds gathering ever more ominously about him François was constrained to submit his faith to the most searching tests. The confidential letters to Antoine Favre tell their own tale. At the end of May he declares an intention of abandoning his adventure when he has completed a year of sterile labour. Then, among the perils and difficulties of the ensuing weeks, the suggestion of withdrawal dies away into silence, and, when the French army had invaded Savoy, when Annecy itself was threatened and the fortunes of war seemed to be turning altogether in favour of heresy, he became more hopeful. The nearness of disaster diverted him from his contemplation of human fickleness; he saw there was no succour save from God only and, having delivered all his hopes into God's keeping, he had peace. And, indeed, the surrender of will demanded by the months that lay behind opened the way to such a profound and personal surrender as would hardly have been within his compass had he remained under the normal conditions of his position as Provost in Annecy, or had achieved any semblance of success in his campaign against Calvinism.

In September 1595 his confidence was justified by an event of vast international importance: the reconciliation of Henri IV with the authority of Rome. After that, although many difficulties remained, the peril of Catholics in the Chablais became less acute. Before this lifting of the clouds, however, François had decided to accept the risk of Calvinist resentment and to make Thonon his headquarters.

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. 53, p. 139.

CHAPTER V

The Faith in the Chablais

It was near the end of February 1595 that François set aside the precautions imposed upon him by Baron d'Hermance and spent a night in Thonon. Mme. Duffoug, the intrepid old lady who from the first had placed her house in rue Vallon at his disposal, now took the risk of giving him shelter. After Easter he stayed no more at the Castle of Allinges, and results soon justified a step that was supposed to be foolhardy. One frantic attempt was made upon his life, from which he escaped by using a secret hiding-place to which his hostess had introduced him; and afterwards Thonon accepted his presence and the more intelligent began to look for the motive power behind his extraordinary pertinacity. On that there followed the first faint signals of the victories one day to be his. A lawyer named Pierre Poncet, who was prominent in Thonon, manifested his readiness to discuss the claims of the Church. Poncet had read and reflected, with the result that he had a deep inward conviction of the truth of the doctrine of the Real Presence.[1] Prejudice and consideration of worldly interest were, in his case, the barriers in the way of his submission, the doctrines of Calvin stood for little, and so it was not long before he yielded to the persuasions of the most ardent of missionaries. Unfortunately the effect of his example was not immediate. His surrender was made in April,[2] and in July there were only eight converts.

The family and friends of the young Provost had some excuse for remonstrances at the waste implied by this very small result from his capacity and attainments. Yet if we pause to give serious thought to the conditions of his labour

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. 49, p. 124. [2] *Ibid.* 50, p. 128.

it is matter for astonishment that he effected any conversions at all; and if those who were at such pains to discourage him had visited the scene of action, they must have seen that a personal victory of this nature portended future triumph. So great a panic did the submission of Poncet create among the Calvinists that their leaders found it necessary to explain it as being the work of Satan and to depict François de Sales spending his nights in an endeavour to exorcise his new convert.[1] They were far from understanding that they had contributed to it by their insistence that Mass should not be said within the borough of Thonon. Seeking to paralyse the mission-priest they endowed him with new power. To understand how this was possible it is necessary to realise the position of the tiny chapel of S. Étienne des Marins, which stood on the farther side of the river Drance. Here François made his daily offering, after he left the fortress of Allinges, and to reach it he had to walk two miles and to cross the wide river by a bridge so notoriously unsafe that at one period it could be negotiated only on hands and knees. Four miles of rough and perilous journeying does not seem to the ordinary mind the most favourable opening for a day of toil, yet François chose this daily exercise, and because he did so those who looked on grew puzzled.

The Calvinists had been taught to regard the Mass as a mingling of superstition and idolatry, yet there was something about the demeanour of François de Sales in his going and coming that shook their certainties, and they were beginning to find out what manner of man this was to whom it meant so much. Thus the daily act that fulfilled his own daily need, and was never witnessed by those in whose service the rest of the day was spent, had its own place in the work of conversion. The wonder aroused by the knowledge of it sometimes proved too insistent to be stifled, and François desired above all things to provoke a desire to question. Probably it is true that no Calvinist who approached him with honest inquiry as to the doctrine of the Blessed Sacrament ever remained a Calvinist. The force of absolute conviction, aided by love and fervour such as

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. 57, p. 155.

his, is hard to withstand, and under normal conditions the people must have been drawn to him in their hundreds. The conditions were not normal, however. Persecution and injustice had been so widely used in the name of religion that Catholic and Calvinist had learnt to attribute, each to the other, the intention of evil, deliberate and constant. François aroused suspicion by his unwavering patience ; it seemed so impossible that love should prompt his gentleness that he was regarded as a master of dissimulation, and sometimes hope died within him as he felt the antagonism on every hand. After nearly a year's experience he wrote of his mission as " A burden beyond my strength." [1] Yet, though it was a slow progress, the magic of his presence worked surely. As soon as the people of Thonon learnt to trust him as a man they made their first step towards the Faith of which he was the messenger.

François had returned to Thonon in August after journeys to Annecy and Chambéry and the Castle of Sales. With the exception of Antoine Favre he had no one who encouraged him in his task, and he came back to it with a heavy heart. Good reason for new hope awaited him, however. That which he most desired, and the Calvinists most dreaded, was the conversion of a leader. One really prominent figure, seen crossing to his side, would crystallise the hidden doubts of hundreds, and as he entered on his second year of labour he perceived that such a prize was likely to be his.

Antoine de Saint-Michel, Seigneur d'Avully, held great position in the eyes of all who dwelt in the Chablais, and by reason of his birth, his character, and his achievement in letters and in arms, he was regarded as a bulwark of Calvinism. His name appears for the first time in the correspondence of François de Sales in September 1595,[2] but tradition says that he listened to the first sermon of the new-made deacon in the Cathedral at Annecy during the festival of Corpus Christi 1593. Perhaps the seed may have been sown then which showed signs of life more than two years later when M. d'Avully and the syndics of Thonon expressed their desire for a statement of the Catholic doctrine regarding the Blessed Sacrament. " As they have begun to hold

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. 57, p. 153. [2] *Ibid.* 59 p. 158.

parley they will soon surrender," François wrote to Antoine Favre, with a note of elation never before present in his letters from the scene of action. And elation was justified by the event, for, although there is record that the public abjuration of Avully took place before the papal nuncio in Turin and was delayed till the following August, it is clear that he was recognised as the friend and supporter of the Catholic missionaries a very few weeks after his request for teaching on the Sacred Mysteries.

To have won M. d'Avully for the Church might be a great achievement, but it had its aftermath of bitterness. For, if pledges had been kept and support given at that season, the success of the mission need no longer have hung in the balance. The people were ready for conversion, and the opportunity was lost because religious zeal did not direct the councils of those who ruled Savoy. The difficulty of the situation at this point became so acute that François accepted the call to new adventure. In December 1595,[1] claiming privilege as priest and missionary and relying also on his condition as one of the old nobility, he wrote a letter of protest to the Duke. In it he represented respectfully and simply that, if the desire to restore the province to the Church was real, the Duke must make his intention plain to his subjects and show that his authority was on the side of the Faith. He must also make some provision for ministering to converts. Priests required stipends, and the ruined churches could not be used for worship till they were restored. And if force should prove to be necessary to reclaim the people, force must be employed. Such is the substance of the letters. Two months later he wrote[2] to the same purpose to Riccardi, the newly appointed papal nuncio at Turin, and in the intervening weeks his sense of the pressing need for help had deepened. Zeal and compassion, he suggested, were virtues even more necessary than prudence, at that juncture, in those who directed the affairs of the Chablais. He gave a brief summary of the events of the past sixty years and the difficulties of the present, and the note of severity is unmistakable. He says that the only argument capable of

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. 63, p. 168. [2] *Ibid.* 66, p. 183.

moving the large majority is "the crack of muskets." In brief he showed himself ready to countenance the practice of bribery and compulsion under certain conditions, if by such means he could achieve his end. The conclusions reached in 1596 were confirmed by subsequent experience. In 1601 he desired that the Duke should issue a proclamation passing sentence of banishment on any of his subjects who refused submission to the Church; "by this means many who cannot face banishment from their native land will escape banishment from Paradise."[1] After years of close association with the Calvinists of the Chablais, François no longer gave them credit for sincere conviction; those who refused to acknowledge their errors seemed to him to be actuated either by obstinacy or self-interest; and a strain of ruthlessness alien to his temperament may be traced in his references to them.

Yet when he made his first petition he still believed the people might be won by gentle means, if only the Duke would make it plain to the eyes of all men that the weight of authority was really on the side of the mission priests. He had begun to contemplate the alternative, but he still cherished his first ideal of his own position towards the people he had come to win, and he still desired that those who abjured Calvinism should do so with real conviction and not on impulse.[2] Undoubtedly his personal influence would have touched very much larger numbers if the impenetrable silence of the Duke had not encouraged the suggestion, promulgated from Geneva, that François had come on his own initiative. If that were true, so long as Calvinists were the stronger party in the Chablais, the head of a family dared not betray any interest in Catholic teaching. Thus the swift spreading of a desire for conversion which the missionaries had pictured was checked by human prudence, and later the lost advantage could only be recovered by the use of human force.

The lamentable indifference of Charles Emmanuel to the possibilities and the progress of the mission imposed on François de Sales a degree of suffering which is only possible to sensitive natures. As the year 1596 wore on

[1] *Œuvres*, XII. 144, p. 78. [2] *Ibid.* XI. 77, p. 219.

each letter bears witness to the agonising strain under which he laboured. "I have known from the scriptures that hope deferred maketh the heart sick," he wrote to Favre,[1] "but now as punishment for my sins I am learning it by sharp personal experience. This to-morrow, this everlasting to-morrow has for a long time been my source of misery, for it puts off till to-morrow that which should be done to-day: the establishing of our religion."

During the first year his sense of the supernatural aid behind his efforts had been so strong that he had gone forward with constantly renewed inspiration, with ever new desire for complete self-dedication. Living day by day on this exalted level, intent on work which is the work of angels, he had been suddenly brought down to earth by a revelation of the methods and the motives prompting the works of men. To dwell among an alien people, who regarded him with suspicion and dislike, had been hard, and it had needed a long struggle to check his own impatience before he could begin to win their hearts. Having struggled and overcome, he claimed that his victory should be recognised —and he found it discredited and set aside. The position was inexplicable unless he had foes hidden in the ranks of his allies,[2] and so, when written remonstrance proved of no effect, he resolved to go to Turin and present his case before the Duke. This was in September 1596. Before setting forth he wrote to the papal nuncio[3] telling him of his intended journey, and of his decision, should it prove fruitless, to surrender his charge into hands more competent.

In the series of letters to various correspondents that disclose the bitterness of his spirit he maintains always a dignified reserve, and his suggestion of retiring is the acknowledgment of failure rather than the threat born of disappointment. Indeed he grew in wisdom and in fortitude during those dark months of 1596, and when he reached Turin his demeanour there bore witness to his capacity for leadership. His reception by his sovereign encouraged him to believe that the delays which were so fatal to his cause were due

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. 69, p. 193.
[2] See Letter to the Duke, March 19, 1596, *ibid.* p. 189.
[3] *Ibid.* 72, p. 202.

to misapprehension, and, having made a full report on the position in private, as well as publicly in Council, he received the Duke's assent to each one of his requests and left Turin with the burden of care lifted from his heart. He returned joyfully to Sales to await the official letters necessary to give effect to the Ducal promises. In those days he had small experience of statecraft and still regarded promises as sacred. When his hope died and he realised that he had been deceived, he learnt a lesson that was of profit to the mission.

November found him once more at Thonon without anything to show as the fruit of his journey; indeed, his position must have been weakened by it and he had been made (as he observed repeatedly) " a byword and a laughing stock among the Calvinists." Again a crisis called for some decisive action, and no doubt his secret adversaries at the ducal court were rejoicing in the certainty of his withdrawal. Many a good man, finding himself so betrayed, would have made a duty of resentment and refused to be exposed again to the contempt which is the portion of the dupe. François, having satisfied himself that the negligence of the law-givers at Turin was deliberate and considered, found in it a motive for independent effort; and if the course he chose suggests defiance, it was defiance spiritualised. He had waited long for support from the authority of a Catholic prince; when it failed him he used the authority of his priesthood. In the first hour of Christmas Day 1596, he said Mass in the Church of S. Hippolyte at Thonon, where the saying of Mass had been prohibited for sixty years.

It is not necessary to strain the evidence to find in that supreme venture of faith the turning-point of his experience in the Chablais. Since he entered on his mission his advance had been most marked at those stages when he set aside the counsels of the prudent. Repeatedly he risked death at the hands of the Calvinists and the ruin of his career from the displeasure of the Duke, and always the risks had served his cause. By that Midnight Mass he braved the full violence of Calvinist fanaticism as never before, and at the same time, by forestalling the formal sanction which had not been accorded from Turin, he laid himself open to

such a rebuff as would have crippled all his future efforts. His letters give little more than the statement of the fact. On the feast of S. Thomas, in letters to the Duke and to the papal nuncio,[1] he announced his purpose, which of necessity would take effect before a prohibitive command—had such been issued—could reach him. Another letter[2] to the Duke just two months later shows all he had suffered from suspense as to the verdict of authority upon his venture.

In fact, it is hardly correct to say that he chose his course at this juncture. When he returned to Thonon from Turin, more than ever heart-sick with hope deferred, he saw that to continue to preach Christ from the pulpit of S. Hippolyte was useless if there were no altar where he might show forth His Death in the Holy Sacrifice. For many months he had said Mass in a suburb on the brink of the lake, in the chapel of Montjou, thus coming nearer to his goal; but the conviction that the people of Thonon could never learn the Faith until the Blessed Sacrament was in their midst so seized upon him as to admit of no alternative. So he left prudence and expediency to those who controlled the march of events at Turin; at Thonon he had no use for them.

If his venture had ended in disaster there would have been many tongues in Turin and Chambéry ready with blame for his foolhardiness: when it prospered it aroused no comment, and the promises on which his hopes had rested continued unfulfilled.[3] Among the Chablaisians, however, the fame of that Great Act of Christmas morning spread far and wide. Christ, being thus lifted up, drew men to Him. Barriers which François, hitherto, had never been allowed to pass were, one by one, withdrawn, and early in March we hear of more calls upon his preaching than he could fulfil. By Easter he was worn out with the confessions of the newly converted! Perhaps the unremitting toil of the long months had been too full of disappointment for rejoicing in his victories, and he hardly realised the change that had come to pass, for his letters show no trace of exultation. And the new conditions

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. pp. 225–9. [2] *Ibid.* p. 231.
[3] Letters to papal nuncio and to the Duke, *ibid.* pp. 239, 246, 279, etc.

brought new difficulties not less baffling than the old. The fields at last were ripe for harvest and the labourers were withheld. The revenue which normally would have supported the parish priests of the district had been granted by a papal bull of April 1575 to a Religious Order, the Knights of S. Maurice and S. Lazare, until such time as it should again be needed.[1] The time of need had arrived, but those who enjoyed the income of these country cures were not disposed to relinquish it. François asked for eighteen priests to carry on the work of forty-five parishes,[2] and for these the means to live must be provided. "For a priest in these parts there is scarcity of everything, except unkindness," he wrote[3] sadly. The work required of each one demanded the best powers of men in their prime, and even a good priest could not live without some provision. If money was withheld the souls, won at the cost of so much striving, must inevitably lapse into indifference. Therefore he became fiercely importunate. Letter after letter was despatched to the Duke and the nuncio, and the constant reiteration of the same demands tells its own heart-rending tale of perpetual check and disappointment. Rome and Turin alike were lavish with approval of the measures he suggested and of the work he did. Of the definite support he craved both were equally niggardly; and if even a fraction of the revenues necessary to the Chablaisian parishes were to be squeezed from the Knights of S. Lazare, the voice of authority must speak with no uncertain note. It was hard to preserve patience when the voice of authority continued silent.

No doubt the position was not nearly so simple as it appeared to him, because to him one end in life and one only was worth pursuing. And yet even in those early days he learnt to recognise some of the difficulties that hampered Charles Emmanuel. He had begun with the idea that the word of the Duke was law. After four years' experience he acknowledged[4] that the real source of much of the trouble was the disobedience of the Duke's subjects to their sovereign. The orders for which he pleaded in

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. p. 232, *note*.
[2] *Ibid.* 90, p. 257.
[3] *Ibid.* 86, p. 242.
[4] *Ibid.* 108, p. 332.

many cases had been given—and were ignored. And so there was no money to support the priests, no houses to shelter them, and no furnishing for the devastated churches when the people came to worship. The tragedy of it is very familiar to the missionary in every generation; for François de Sales the special poignancy lay in the greatness of the conquest within reach which—for such inadequate and sordid reasons—he saw frustrated. His hopes had not stopped short of Geneva. In a letter to the Pope [1] he says that he found constant excuses for going there, and it is evident that he watched the progress of every treaty between European powers, anxiously waiting for a clause restoring Catholic worship in the stronghold of Calvinism.[2] But the wavering policy of his chiefs defeated all his projects, and the rebel city loomed so large on the horizon of his mind that even his most successful efforts for conversion were shadowed by the sense of failure.

To a man of his temperament, sensitive and nervous to an acute degree, the element of personal opposition in the difficulties confronting him was an aggravation of distress. He knew that his motives had been misrepresented and his reputation undermined at Turin, even while he in Thonon was living "in the isolation of a leper." [3] The true meaning of his years in the Chablais is missed when their history is regarded as a chain of incidents in an important missionary enterprise. Their importance is not due to the conversion of the Chablaisian people (which by some means or other would have been achieved as the Duke's hold over the district became firmer): it rests on their effect upon François de Sales himself. For the first two years he had to struggle against his own sense of failure and the discouragement lavished on him by others; afterwards, when he began to win and his way grew clearer, the burden of responsibility laid upon him was almost too heavy to be borne. There were many months when every detail connected with the converts throughout the province, whether by parishes or as individuals, depended on his judgment. Often he had to care for their temporal welfare

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. 98, p. 268.
[2] *Ibid.* 110, p. 339.
[3] *Ibid.* 90, p. 259.

lest they should suffer for their surrender to the Church; and always he desired that their belief should be grounded on real understanding of the Faith they were beginning to profess. Personal dealing on so large a scale might be held to leave no space for other efforts, yet the whole organisation on which the future of the Church in the Chablais depended was planned by him. He passed in review the priests known to him in person or by reputation, and strove to choose the fittest for each difficult post on the territory where he secured a footing. The Capuchin monks Père Cherubin and Père Esprit came at his invitation, and their eloquence and skill in dialectic struck terror to the hearts of the Protestant theologians. He decided, in consultation with men competent to advise, that a house where Jesuits could be resident must be established at Thonon,[1] and he began to plead the necessity of this at a time when the most obvious essentials for the continuance of the mission were still withheld. Also, in spite of the dangerous antagonism which such a course inevitably aroused, he attacked the monasteries.[2] The spectacle of dissolute religious, injurious enough to the faithful, was a very grave hindrance to the progress of the Church when presented before heretics. And the prayers that should have gone up from the Abbeys of Sixt and of Abondance, and the example and inspiraiton of the consecrated lives that should have been led by their inhabitants, were infinitely needed in a district where the spirit of sacrilege and infidelity had so long been rampant. Seeing the evil François struck at it, although he was already fighting single-handed against a host of adverse forces.

Courage of a very high order, both physical and moral, was developed in him during the closing years of his mission; but the strong foundation to which his work owed its permanence was due to the capacity for vision that kept him undismayed when every hour of the day brought a new threat or a fresh disappointment. Because of this he would not lower the standard he set himself at the beginning of his mission, or work for swift results. He desired, before he surrendered his task into other hands, to make progress certain, and to shield his successors from the grave hindrances

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. 101, p. 309. [2] *Ibid.* pp. 262, 266.

he had himself encountered; therefore his vision of the future restrained and guided him in all he did.

In the spring of 1598, when he had gone to Annecy to prepare for a journey to Rome on the business of the mission, severe illness brought him to death's door. Strong though he was in mind and body, he had, once more, so overtaxed his powers that they failed him. For three months he was disabled, and during that time his work in the Chablais went on under the guidance of Père Cherubin and the parish priests whom he had chosen. Thus his gradual severance from his great enterprise began, and he prepared to leave the consolidation of the victory to others. One scheme remained, depending for success on the care and skill with which he directed it. The Forty Hours Devotion at Thonon showed to the world that the Church had once more claimed her own in the Chablais. The idea of it appears to have originated with Père Cherubin,[1] but it required the zeal and the patient insistence of François de Sales to bring it into being. The time chosen was the autumn of 1598; less than two years, it should be remembered, after the restoration of the Mass in Thonon.

The ceremonies of the Forty Hours were probably devised originally in reparation for the offences of the Protestants, the first recorded instance of their use being at Milan in 1533; and it was a bold measure to announce them in a place that had so recently been acknowledged as a Calvinist stronghold. The chief obstacles to success did not emanate from Geneva, however; as usual François had most to bear from the negligence and uncertainties of his supporters. It had seemed essential that the Duke should be present, but when, after many changes, he fixed a date and all the elaborate preparations had been made, he failed to keep his engagement, and the ceremonies took place without him.

The absence of the Duke eliminated the political interest of the occasion and deepened its religious character. Bishop Granier inaugurated the Devotion with Mass at the Augustinian church, and then, for the first time for sixty years, the Blessed Sacrament was carried through the

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. 106, p. 322.

streets of Thonon before being exposed on the High Altar for the adoration of the people. The excitement was intense. Troops of pilgrims arrived from all directions, even from parts of Burgundy. The inhabitants of many villages in Savoy came to the Bishop to be absolved from their heresy and received into the Church. And the impression of those two solemn days was deepened, even for those who strove to hold aloof, by the stately ceremonial and by the teaching of priests and religious, chosen for their eloquence. François de Sales had become a very able commander of spiritual forces, and he lost no advantage the position offered. When the arrival of Charles Emmanuel and the Papal Legate Cardinal de Medici was announced for a date later by eleven days than that originally fixed, he determined to repeat the Forty Hours.

In this decision there is evidence of a purpose far deeper than compliment to two eminent persons. The coming of their sovereign in company with the representative of the Pope did at last declare to the people that authority was on the side of the Church, and suggested, to a generation accustomed to persecution, that their lives and their possessions would not be jeopardised by acceptance of the Faith. François, though he asked that heresy should be penalised and conversion rewarded, found little satisfaction in the surrender prompted by self-interest; and he foresaw that many hundreds who had turned a deaf ear to persuasion would hasten to renounce their errors at the first threat of force. It fell out as he expected, and every waverer became convinced of error as soon as the Duke appeared in the streets of Thonon. The second observance of the Forty Hours had not been needed to produce this result, rather it was the expression of the vivid faith of François de Sales, which persuaded him that this call, sounding for the second time through Thonon and the surrounding district, would have transforming power of another kind. He saw those who approached in grudging obedience to the Duke of Savoy, discovering the true meaning of conversion and claiming the inheritance of Catholics with strong desire.

We have no means of judging how far his vision found true realisation. That the people came in their thousands

to seek reconciliation with the Church is undeniable, and in outward seeming the work he had come to do, just four years earlier, was done. And so that chapter ended. The figure of François de Sales continued to be familiar to the Chablaisians so long as his life lasted, but the coming of the Duke and those autumn Days of Devotion before the Altar in Thonon closed his relation to them as their mission priest.

CHAPTER VI

The Paris of Henri IV

The political relations at this period between Savoy, the Swiss Cantons, and France were especially intricate.[1] Henri IV, although he had submitted to the Church, still gave support and protection openly to Calvinist Geneva; while Berne, jealous of the power over their neighbour state that France was acquiring, intrigued with Charles Emmanuel and so weakened the Protestant position. At no time perhaps have political and religious interests become so inextricably entangled, and no one was ever less tolerant of the intrusion of political calculation on the domain of religious interest than François de Sales.

In the October following the Forty Hours Devotion at Thonon he was stirred to vehement indignation[2] by the proposals, emanating from France, to use the Peace of Vervins so as to secure to Geneva the possessions she had usurped, and destroy all hope of restoring Catholic worship in the Cathedral or in any part of the city. In the midst of overwhelming labour in the Chablais his mind had never been diverted from his longing to win Geneva. For months he had fixed his hopes on the conversion of Théodore de Beze,[3] and his repeated journeys to Geneva were made to obtain interviews with the celebrated Calvinist. The relations of the Catholic missionary with the disciple and successor of Calvin are so diversely described and interpreted that it is impossible to determine what actually took place, or whether there existed any real foundation for the theory,

[1] *Cf.* Oechsli, *Hist. of Switzerland* (1922), ch. xiii.

[2] *Œuvres*, XI. 118, p. 361.

[3] Author of a History of the Reformed Churches; born in France 1519, died in Geneva 1605. See Bernus, *Théodore de Beze à Lausanne.*

so freely promulgated by the Catholics, that Beze was only withheld from repudiating the convictions he had held and taught for forty years, by motives of self-esteem and worldly interest. There is no doubt, however, that François suffered grievous disappointment when his efforts proved to be barren of result [1]; and also that the fame of this enterprise did more to establish his reputation with those able to make or to hinder his future fortunes than any record of slow, unpretentious labour among the humble folk in the Chablais.

Unending speculations and intrigues centred on Geneva in those days, and no man could foretell the next chapter in that history. The proposed inclusion of the rebel city in the Peace of Vervins aroused such violent feeling among Catholics in Savoy that Bishop Granier decided to make representations to the Pope as to the grave consequences that must ensue if the terms received this interpretation.[2] And when it became necessary to choose an envoy his choice fell on François de Sales. The work of the solitary mission priest being at an end and its object achieved, it was fitting that he should have opportunity to give an account of his stewardship and that its result should be recognised. The charge of using it for personal advantage could not be brought against him. Almost it might be urged that he had carried indifference as to worldly fortune to excess. A friend of his family described a visit once paid to him in his rooms in rue Vallon in Thonon, where he was found busy with needle and thread mending his tattered clothes. He said of himself that he had got through the time without actual want,[3] and when the Duke sent him a sum of money to reimburse his personal expenses during the mission years, he gave it to the fund for providing the accessories of worship, and rebuilding the ruined churches of the Chablais. Yet his own resources were meagre; his mother had provided him with clothing and often with food, and a time came at length when his own financial position gave him a measure of anxiety. In May 1597 he wrote to the papal nuncio a statement regarding it, and asked for permission to resign his office as Provost, which involved duties he found difficult

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. 93, p. 268.
[2] *Ibid.* 119, p. 365.
[3] *Ibid.* 97, p. 298.

to fulfil, and to receive instead the cure of Petit Bornand, worth 200 crowns annually and one of the best in the diocese. He had weighed the matter carefully, he said, and had decided that it would be better to be a curé with an income than a provost without one, and if he had means to live he had no other desire than to serve the Church within the diocese with every power he possessed. Actually the cure of Petit Bornand was contested by another claimant and brought him nothing but weariness and vexation; but his desire for it is an indication of his own regard for the future. He was weary, although he was not yet thirty years old, and his experience of the world and its methods had made the possession of a country living and its opportunity of hidden forms of service the prospect most to be desired.

Very soon after his petition for the cure of Petit Bornand the project of his appointment as coadjutor and eventual successor to Bishop Granier took definite form.[1] The idea was no novelty. Early in the previous year, while still engrossed with the mission in the Chablais, he had written to a friend at the Court of Charles Emmanuel to express his disinclination for such an office.[2] It seemed to him to promise an endless continuance of the difficult relations with politicians of Church and State which had been the hardest part of his charge, and he was dismayed by the prospect. Evidently he had pictured the service he might render to the Church on very different lines and, when at length he submitted to the urgency of his Bishop, he did so with reluctance. The illness which prevented his journey to Rome in the spring of 1598 delayed the fulfilment of the project, but delay only strengthened the purpose of Bishop Granier. When at length François started for Rome as envoy to the Pope concerning the Peace of Vervins he was accompanied by François de Chissé, nephew and Vicar-General of the Bishop, who was charged with formal Letters of Request for the appointment to the coadjutorship.

The two envoys from Annecy were received with the utmost consideration at the Papal Court, and, at the public examination—to which as a prospective bishop he was required to submit—François so distinguished himself that

[1] *Œuvres*, XI. 99, p. 306. [2] *Ibid.* 65, p. 182.

the Pope and the assembly of Cardinals were open in their expression of approval, and his fame for eloquence and learning spread far and wide. His examination took place in March 1599, and two days after it Clement VIII signed the bull which fulfilled one of the objects of his embassy: the command to the Knights of S. Lazare to surrender the revenues of the Chablaisian parishes. Besides this, which was a cause of such intimate rejoicing to himself, he was admitted as a signal mark of personal favour to make Communion at the hand of the Pope[1]; and so, with his former impression of awe and reverence for the Eternal City deepened, he left Rome for another pilgrimage to Loretto, and passed on to seek the Duke of Savoy at Turin.

His own future seemed to be secure, and he had obtained the means of providing for the newly converted flock in the Chablais, but he remained unsatisfied as to the position of Geneva, and on the whole the result of his mission gave no ground for elation. It proved even less fruitful than it appeared at its close. The Knights of S. Lazare were a powerful company holding many threads of interest in the Government of Savoy, and the Papal bull that transferred their revenues to the parish priests in the Chablais did not produce the effect that François anticipated.[2] They found innumerable details that must be discussed by the Council at Turin before the Duke gave his sanction to the transference, and, having many friends at Court, they contrived to prolong these discussions and to invent fresh methods of evasion. Meanwhile, the danger of the newly converted lapsing into indifference was obvious, for neither churches nor priests could be maintained without funds. To François no other purpose seemed more worthy or of more importance than the confirming of the Chablaisian people in the Faith; and once again to see it thwarted by the self-interest and avarice of professing Catholics brought him to a state of mind that bordered on despair.[3] It must be remembered, however, that his preoccupation resulted from his close knowledge, possessed in equal degree by no one else, while, on the other hand, the cause he pleaded with such persistence

[1] *Année Sainte*, iii. 638.
[2] *Œuvres*, XII. 126, p. 18.
[3] *Ibid.* 140, p. 63.

was only one among many causes with which those in supreme authority had to deal. In March 1601, just two years after receiving the Papal bull for the coercion of the Knights of S. Lazare, he forwarded to Rome a protest referring to the decision of His Holiness and the indifference with which it had been treated. The letter has a note by the hand of Clement VIII to the effect that he did not remember what his decision had been.[1]

Only if we have followed François de Sales step by step in his experience among the Calvinists of this unhappy province, and realised the quality of that burning zeal which triumphed over odds humanly insurmountable, can we grasp the significance of the Pope's comment. Actually, this matter which so engrossed his thoughts, this victory he had won at such great cost, did not loom very large in the view of those to whom he owed obedience, either in Rome or in Turin. His pleadings and his protests were received indulgently—and remained ineffective. If it was needful that he should be schooled in the practice of detachment no method better than this could be imagined.

The two years succeeding his embassy to the Papal Court were divided between his work as Provost at Annecy and the fulfilment of calls for assistance that came from the districts nearer to Geneva. These years were not marked by the hardships and perils that had tested his endurance at an earlier period, but they brought a burden of anxiety no whit less heavy. The restless ambitions of Charles Emmanuel destroyed any hope of peace, and the border of his dominion nearest to Switzerland was crossed continually by invading troops from Berne and from Geneva. His converts were as his children to François ; he was solicitous for their bodily safety as well as for their spiritual progress, and, while he gloried in the fortitude that many of them displayed, their sufferings caused him infinite distress. Moreover, the suspicion which must at times have assailed him, that their individual welfare counted nothing in the calculations of their ruler and liege lord, suggested possibilities of catastrophe difficult to face. It will be recognised

[1] " Non ci ricordiamo in che termini stiano questi negotii."—*Œuvres*, XII. p. 58, *note*.

that there was much in the circumstances of these two years to cause a condition of despondency, and the general tone of such letters as have been preserved suggests that he became despondent.

The spring of 1601 brought sorrow and anxiety by reason of the illness of M. de Boisy, who died at his Castle of Sales a fortnight before Easter. No vestige of past bitterness remained to deepen the pain of parting, however, for he had long been reconciled to the way of life chosen by his first-born, and the sorrowing family turned with eager loyalty and devotion to François as their head. Responsibility was his sole inheritance, for the property did not yield more than was needed to maintain the family home, over which Mme. de Boisy reigned, and his personal fortunes at that moment were precarious.

The formalities of his appointment as coadjutor had made no advance in the two years since his examination before the Pope and the College of Cardinals,[1] and his experiences during that period had not increased his desire for high office ; yet, having allowed himself to be nominated, he recognised the necessity for some decision in the matter. In August 1601 he wrote to the papal nuncio a frank declaration of his position. If the Brief for appointment could only be obtained at the cost of considerable expenditure he had decided to relinquish any claim to it, and in stating his decision he gives his own view of the proffered dignity. " It offered no advantages," he wrote,[2] " but only incredible difficulties. The greater part of the revenue is in enemy hands and the labour is so enormous that only in the sweat of his brow shall the Bishop eat of such bread as it affords him."

With the glowing vision before us of the twenty years of the saint's episcopate this letter makes strange reading, but it confirms the impression that he had sounded depths of disillusion and discouragement in the interval between his mission service and his entry on high office. Actually, 200 crowns demanded for his appointment were paid by Mme. de Boisy in the following spring. This proved to be inevitable, for withdrawal at that stage, when already he was

[1] *Œuvres*, XII. 137, p. 57. [2] *Ibid.* 142, p. 73.

regarded as the future Bishop and saluted as Monseigneur, would have involved injury to his reputation.[1] Probably he never desired the honours awaiting him, but it was his destiny to face the "incredible difficulties" of ruling a diocese more torn and divided than any other in Christendom, and he accepted it.

He was to pass through an important experience, however, before he reached the Bishop's throne at Annecy, and it claimed him suddenly as his great task in the Chablais had done. Try as he would to hold aloof from politics, his way of life was as much affected by the terms of treaties and the intrigues of contending statesmen as if he had followed the calling intended for him and sat in the Senate of Savoy. The Peace signed at Lyons in January 1601, had a result that, in connection with his spiritual development, was momentous. For, by the provisions of this Peace, part of the diocese of Geneva became French territory, and the vexed question of supporting priests in districts where Calvinists had seized on the property of the Church had to be opened at the Court of Henri IV. François de Sales, who had fought this battle at Turin, was obviously the fittest person to enter the lists in Paris, and when it became clear that the Catholics of the newly acquired province of Gex had no place in the calculations of the King of France, Bishop Granier announced the coming of the Provost of Geneva to plead their cause.

A journey to Paris was a great event, and François accepted the mission readily. He had been cheered by the evidence of deepening faith among the people of the Chablais during a recent visit,[2] and he set out on his travels with high hopes from the new opportunities opening before him. Always the ultimate goal of his ambition was the restoration of Geneva to the Church, and it had long been plain that the sole hope of its fulfilment rested with the King of France. So, beyond the immediate purpose of his embassy, it may well be that he had dreams of carrying another message from the shores of Lake Leman to the new convert who ruled in Paris; and of winning response of a more satisfying quality than had ever been accorded from Turin. Actually, there

[1] *Œuvres*, XII. 158, p. 115. [2] *Ibid.* 149, p. 89.

was no more astute time-server in Europe than Henri IV, and François had too much experience of human nature to be long deceived by the bluff good-humour that masked the processes of state-craft. The days were over when such a discovery as awaited him at the French Court could darken his outlook on the world. Paris had many things to teach him and, as his eyes opened to new knowledge, he saw the march of events with wider vision. Thereafter the conversion of Calvinist Geneva—though it remained the object of his persistent labour and solicitude—no longer engrossed him to the exclusion of other interests.

It may be said, briefly, that he achieved very little in his character as envoy. Expenses were greater and progress slower than had been anticipated.[1] Also, when his errand at the French Court became known at Geneva, two deputies of the Republic were despatched from thence to work against him.[2] It is true that M. de Villeroy, Secretary of State, promised that without doubt justice should be done, and no one disputed the justice of the claim that the property of the Church should be used to support Catholic priests instead of Calvinist ministers. Wherever he went François was received with the utmost deference and consideration; nevertheless, "I was never so hindered," he wrote,[3] after two months of audiences and negotiations. Every report despatched to Annecy echoed the same plaint: "The conduct of affairs at this Court is so complicated that when one seems on the point of escape one is really the most entangled,"[4]—and escape was not effected until the autumn. To the Pope, and to Charles Emmanuel, François referred to this period as "nine months wasted." Henri IV confirmed his original promise of providing for Catholic worship in the parishes of Gex, Farges and Asserens, and probably it was due to the pressure exercised that he gave effect to his promise. But he made no further concession, and such a result could not be held to justify the time and the money spent in Paris by the Provost of Geneva. In their effect on the personal development of François de Sales, however, these nine months, far from being wasted, have particular importance.

[1] *Œuvres*, XII. 152, p. 102.
[2] *Ibid.* 154, p. 107.
[3] *Ibid.* 153, p. 104.
[4] *Ibid.* 156, p. 110.

When, sixteen years earlier, the student from Savoy ended his studies at the College of Clermont, the life of Paris with which he had grown familiar differed materially from that which he found when he returned, on this fruitless errand, to the Court of Henri IV. Society was hardly less dissolute, it is true, than under the rule of the Valois, and as yet there had been nothing to raise the moral standards of the people. Nevertheless, the religious renaissance, destined to work such miracles of change in the hearts of the men and women of France, was already evident to those who had eyes for spiritual manifestation. Its early stages are as difficult to define as is its origin. During the civil wars the clergy, secular and religious, were as much absorbed in politics as the laity, the chief use of pulpit oratory lay in the attack or defence of political creeds, and many of the black crimes which defile the history of that period were supposed to have been perpetrated in the interests of religion. The true religious instinct, therefore, could not be satisfied with the travesty of religion presented by the officials of the Church, and the true religious instinct survived in France despite the depravity of the Valois and the arrogance of the Guises. And, although the character and the faith of Henri IV were not such as to encourage the spread of religion among his subjects, the dawn of religious renaissance seems to coincide with his coming to the throne of France. And the explanation may be found in the records showing the point of hollowness and insincerity that had been reached by the adherents of the League in the years following the murder of Henri de Guise.[1] For the League stood ostensibly for the Catholic faith; the opposition to the King of Navarre was the opposition of Catholic to Protestant, and the violence of sectarian hatred had reached a point when patriotism went down before it and the phraseology of religion, on either side, had lost its meaning. The danger to France was grave, and her loyal sons were aghast at the hallucination that made Frenchmen more eager to attack each other than to defend their country against her foes. The protest framed by one of them sheds light on the position: "Let such words as Huguenot or

[1] Dec. 23, 1588.

Papist be heard no more, in their place let us speak only of Spaniards and of Frenchmen ! " [1]

Thus the shouts of welcome that greeted the new King were signals of a reaction that signified more than a change of party. France directed by the League had come near to being clutched by Spain, and Frenchmen awakening to that peril were moved to shame at their own blindness. And with a few, at any rate, there were searchings of heart that bore fruit when the crisis itself had long ceased to claim their thoughts. For them the Faith of their fathers was not represented by the truculent priests who had made sermons the vehicle of party propaganda, and their belief that they were heirs to a hidden treasure sprang from their realisation of the extreme poverty to which misrepresentation of the Faith had reduced them. The quest that resulted from such realisation went on in secret, yet before many years had passed the discoveries of the few began to have effect on the lives of many. When the new century opened, religion in France had escaped from the entanglement of party politics, and from time to time the action of individuals (among whom Henri de Joyeuse is particularly notable) fired the imagination, and challenged the sincerity of those who accounted themselves faithful sons and daughters of the Church.

In 1602, when François de Sales came to Paris, this new movement was not yet recognised by the ordinary world. It was gathering strength and making ventures without attracting curiosity by any declaration of its aim. Paris held many churches, yet the man or woman harassed by remorse or spiritual difficulty had no certainty of finding guidance or consolation. The standard of the parish priest was tainted by the disorderly living common to all classes. The Jesuits were exiled ; the Franciscan friars of the Faubourg S. Honoré—who did so much to stimulate this new spiritual adventure—were in bad odour with Court and Parliament ; and the Carthusians were difficult of access by reason of their Rule as well as by the remote position of their monastery. Thus, between incapable parish priest and unapproachable religious there was meagre provision for the souls of the laity.

[1] P. Duplessis Mornay, *Mém. de la Ligue*, i. 102.

A general and superficial survey of developments, as the years of the century went on, may suggest that the needs of that moment were recognised and met with deliberate intention. The modern mind will picture the forming of a committee ; the recommendations of the experts ; the subsequent concerted action. And a series of events give support to such a theory. In 1611, the French Oratorians began their life in common. In 1625, Vincent de Paul and his Mission priests opened their campaign against ignorance and indifference and selfishness ; and thereafter " movements " innumerable engaged the energy of priests and people, until no part of France was altogether destitute of spiritual provision. It would be natural to see François de Sales taking part in the plans for this transformation, and marking the gradual fulfilment of the programme from distant Annecy. In fact, however, there is no indication of any endeavour of this kind. A little group were thinking deeply and praying earnestly, and François de Sales had touch with them, but to a practical mind, the object of their thoughts and prayers would have seemed singularly irrelevant to the problems of the moment.

The letters written from Paris by the young Provost are concerned chiefly with business, and give no hint of the extraordinary importance of these months to his spiritual and mental growth. He met kinsmen from Savoy in attendance on M. de Nemours ; at the Court of Henri IV he began his life-long friendship with M. des Hayes ; and, from the first, the claims upon his time were greater than he could meet. Tradition says he was extremely handsome, and noble and dignified of bearing ; and apart from the attraction of his goodness he possessed the gift of charm. During the six months of his stay he preached more than a hundred times, and popularity and devotion were so rarely to be found together that those who flocked to hear him were unprepared for so spiritual a message.

" I have been forced, so that I could not escape without ill manners, to preach three times a week before the princesses and the Court,"—so he wrote in March 1602.[1] A month

[1] *Œuvres*, XII. 153, p. 105.

later came a summons to Fontainebleau to preach before the King. In his capacity as envoy he had not yet gained admittance to the royal presence, and the reputation of Henri IV did not encourage the belief that as a priest he was likely to find favour. His success is a matter of history, and he might have commanded any preferment in France if he would have consented to remain within reach of Paris; but his answer to one of the King's proposals to lure him from Savoy when he had become a bishop declares his mind on his obligation to the distracted diocese at home. "Sire," said he, "I am already married; my wife is poor and I cannot desert her for a wealthier one."

For all their friendliness, therefore, no concession was made on either side. François de Sales remained firm in his allegiance to his own country; and Henri IV left his Calvinist subjects to dispose of the revenues that rightfully belonged to the Catholic Church. And yet, although his dealings with the King were barren of result, François had cause for life-long thankfulness for his connection with the Court of Henri IV. The friendships that he made there served to keep him in touch with knowledge of men and affairs, and the recognition accorded him, as preacher and as guide, by men and women high in rank and intellectual capacity, prepared the way for the unassuming little book with which six years later he took the world by storm.[1] Nor was this all that he owed directly to the Court. Among the dwellers in Paris in those days was this group of persons who believed that prayer effected more than statecraft. They were not in close association with Henri IV, nevertheless it was by way of the Louvre and Fontainebleau that François de Sales came to the Hôtel Acarie and found his place among them. He was led thither by Mlle. de Longueville, Princess of the House of Orleans, and cousin to the King.

Mme. Acarie, known in her last years as the Carmelite Marie de l'Incarnation, had married a man whose love for the Church expressed itself in participation in the plottings and violence of the League, rather than in sympathy with devout practice; and she remained a loyal wife and a good

[1] See Vuy, *La Philothée de François de Sales*, i. 85.

mistress of his household until he died.[1] In 1602 they were living together in Paris with their children, on such remnant of fortune as her skill had been able to preserve from the disasters that had fallen on them during the civil war; and it was under these conditions of married life that François de Sales had knowledge of her. The value that he set on their connection is indicated by his own words written nineteen years afterwards.[2] Her portrait had been sent to him, and he says of it: "I cannot imagine anything more pleasing or more useful to me, on the one hand, because I had such love and admiration for this saintly being, and on the other, because I have so urgent a need to revive continually those high aspirations which in past days were suggested by the sight of her and by her holy sayings. For six months almost without a break I was her confessor, and nearly every day I had speech with her on one affair or another that concerned the service of God."

It is worthy of note that the two never met after the six months of close association to which the letter refers had ended, and that during these months Mme. Acarie was subject to all the interruptions incidental to her position as a hostess and the mother of a family. François de Sales, looking back when his own course was nearly run and appraising the value of his knowledge of her, may have recognised that his personal debt was to the woman he had known in the world, who, with interior vision set on things above, ruled her household and conducted business as competently as though the things of earth alone concerned her. From her, in those long ago days, he had learnt the possibility of that achievement in the life of prayer which he was, eventually, to realise for himself, and all that was clamorous and even sordid in her surroundings only added force to the impression that their close spiritual relation made upon him.

Many causes contributed to make Mme. Acarie so great an influence among her contemporaries, and the leader in a movement of incalculable importance to the re-birth of

[1] Du Val, A., *La Vie Admirable de Sœur Marie de l'Incarnation*, 1568–1616 (pub. 1621).

[2] *Œuvres*, XX. 1776, p. 46.

religion in France. The history of her life discloses one of those mysterious vocations against which all the hindrances of circumstance are powerless. At a moment when superstition and cruelty were stifling the vitality of the Church and ordinary life was loaded with anxieties, she found herself so possessed by the need of God that other cares sank into insignificance. Probably only one priest in France could have given her the guidance that her state required, and that was the Englishman, Benedict Canfield, from whom she sought it. He had capacity to recognise the rare gifts of which their possessor was entirely unconscious, and her future course of service owed much to his direction.[1] He was one of the Capuchin friars, whose monastery was the centre of any true devotion left alive in Paris. They had had their part in influencing the student life of François de Sales, and through them Mme. Acarie found her place in the religious movement of her time. She seems to have been forced into a position of spiritual leadership before she had knowledge of the work that was to be her special trust; when the call she followed first reached her ears it awoke no answering desire.

In 1601 M. de Bretigny, a Norman priest of Spanish descent, published translations of the Life and the Writings of S. Teresa, and we are told that Mme. Acarie read them unwillingly and without appreciation. Thus it is evident that she became involved, against her natural inclination, in the adventure of bringing the Carmelites to France. When we remember that she had experience of the difficulty of negotiations requiring Court interest we cannot wonder at her hesitation, for the merest glance at the history of the century just ended will explain the need of very strong interest in high places if Spanish subjects were to be invited to hold position of influence in Paris. Her reluctance was only overcome by repeated visions of S. Teresa; but, once she gave herself to the cause, she gave without stint, and affairs moved rapidly. M. de Bretigny had a practical scheme which the Carthusians supported, and Mlle. de Longueville, appearing at the moment of need, enlisted the support of the King. Thus the movement so insepar-

[1] Broglie, E. de, *La Bienheureuse Marie de l'Incarnation.*

ably connected with the name of Mme. Acarie sprang into vigorous life.

François de Sales was admitted to the council where the plans for this enterprise were discussed. We have seen that the fight against Protestantism had filled his mind ever since he entered on his mission to the Chablais, and his ceaseless activities since his ordination had left him little time for study. There had been scant opportunity for any echo of the message that the Spanish mystics were giving to the world to reach him, and, with his first knowledge of it, came the revelation of its effect upon the little group of thinkers whose intimacy was most precious among the privileges of his months in Paris. He saw these people, faced with the glaring evils that were the legacy of civil war, putting aside all direct methods of contending with them and fixing all their effort on an attempt—seemingly so fantastic—to bring five or six women of an unfriendly nation and establish them in Paris. That which was a mystery to others was not so to him, however, for he held the key to it, and knew that, the need for prayer having been accepted as being primary, the rest must follow. The Carmelites in Spain were the recognised experts in the ways of prayer, and therefore by some means or other they must be brought to France.

In July 1602 Henri IV gave sanction by Letters Patent to this amazing venture and, in October two years later, the Spanish Carmelites, and the French novices under their direction, were established in the Priory of Notre Dame des Champs, afterwards so celebrated as the Great Carmel. In the interval the many difficulties were overcome chiefly by the prayer and industry of Mme. Acarie, of her kinsman Pierre de Bérulle, and of the Norman priest Jean de Bretigny. The only share in their labour assigned to François de Sales was the application to Rome for the necessary authority for the new arrangement.[1] He wrote for this from Annecy and it was obtained. The importance to his life of the coming of the Carmelites does not, of course, rest on the service that he rendered to them nor was it manifested until many years later. In those early days the deliberations

[1] *Œuvres*, XII. 166, p. 131.

at the Hôtel Acarie conveyed much to the stranger from Savoy, and he set forth on his return journey with many themes for reflection to occupy his thoughts upon the road, but as yet he was not ready for the new knowledge associated with Carmel. Nor was much leisure for meditation permitted to him at this time, for at Lyons a messenger from Savoy brought news that Claude Granier (already old at fifty-four) had been taken ill at Thonon during the Jubilee celebrations there and had died, on July 17, at the Castle of Pollinge.

By his death, François de Sales, having been appointed his coadjutor and successor, became Bishop of Geneva.

CHAPTER VII

The Bishop in Annecy

When we consider the pomp and magnificence that surrounded the prince-bishops who were the (titular) predecessors of François de Sales it is hard to picture him as following in their footsteps ; and we are tempted to see in the homely simplicity of Annecy the most fitting background for his progress towards sanctity. The little city by the lake has nothing about it that accords with a desire for display ; it is so divided by canals and quays and narrow arcaded streets that he who goes on foot goes quickest, and, in the early seventeenth century, its whole population was not so great as that of many parishes in England.

We have seen that Henri IV desired the coadjutor of Geneva for a diocese in France, and the people of Savoy were given many occasions for alarm lest their Bishop, who was essentially their own, should be tempted by a more promising or more important field for labour beyond the border of his native land. Yet, apart from his sense of plighted troth, the links that bound François to Annecy would have been very hard to sever. Probably he was only dimly conscious of their strength, and it is only those who attempt, through study of his letters and his books, to achieve intimacy with his mind, who can realise how the process of his thought is interwoven with the influence of his environment. As a child his eyes had rested on the ever-changing grandeur of the mountains around Thorens and La Roche, and in boyhood he passed on to brilliant Annecy and feasted them on colour. He had the artist's temperament and could ill dispense with the glories of natural beauty amid which he had grown up. His pride of race, moreover, declared itself from time to time ; he loved

Savoy and identified himself with her, resenting any reflection on the national character with a vehemence which no insult aimed at himself or even at his own kindred could have provoked. Neither his charity nor his holiness of life would have established the mutual understanding between himself and the humblest and simplest of his flock, without that bond of race on which he set such store.

The message of S. François to the world owes much to this intimacy with his own people in Savoy. The fact that his teaching spread far and wide among the civilised nations, and is still a living force, is due to the knowledge of souls acquired by contact with individuals, and to this, his ministry at home, continued throughout the years as priest and bishop, made valuable contribution. It was not on the mountain-top or in the convent cell that François de Sales grew to be saint and mystic, but amid the constant pressure and distraction of a life lived in the world and subject to the insistent claims of others. And because his life was lived chiefly at Annecy it cannot be dissociated from the little city—to the Bishop of Geneva a place of exile, to the natural man a much-loved home.

His love for his home and for his people did not, however, in any way diminish his sense of grave responsibility towards them; and his first impulse, when the news from Savoy reached him, was to seek counsel from one who had long experience of those duties on which he was about to enter. Pierre de Villars, once Archbishop of Vienne, lived in retirement at Annonay, and although the greater part of his episcopate coincided with the period of civil warfare and religious decadence he had been steadfast in the practice of personal holiness, and had so far defied prevailing custom as to urge upon his brethren the precept that a bishop "should be daily at the Altar, constantly in the pulpit and never in society and at public entertainments."[1] We know that François de Sales interrupted his homeward journey from Paris to seek Pierre de Villars at Annonay. Of what passed between them we have no record, but the life of the old recluse had been a life of prayer and, on leaving him, his guest at once took measures to ensure for himself a

[1] Hamon, *Vie de S. François de Sales*, Vol. I. p. 418.

period of silence before entering on the cares of his new state.

The difficulties that necessitated the mission to Paris were not altered by the death of Bishop Granier, and François completed this task before considering his own spiritual need. The shepherds of the flock in the district of Gex were anxiously awaiting him, and he lost no time in establishing order there in line with the meagre concessions of the King of France. This done he retired to the Castle of Sales with the Jesuit, Père Jean Fourier, who became his director from that time forward. There—in the words of an early chronicler[1]—" delivered from all intruding thoughts, he remained almost in solitude for a period of twenty days and, by constant prayer, by fasting, by the use of the discipline and other similar exercises, he prepared himself to make a general Confession of his sins. After which he drew up a Rule of Life."

Some part of the Rule remains to show us the care with which he ordered each day's routine in its practical and in its spiritual aspect : the disposition of the morning hours, the Mass daily at nine, the recollectedness of the preceding time. Besides the interior offering of which God is the sole witness, he had to remember the effect of his regularity of practice upon others. Thus, having decided for his own peace to make confession every two or three days, as an example he chose from time to time to do so in the open church, under the eyes of his people. And wherever a special devotion or a special festival might gather them together in Annecy he desired to officiate, that they might as far as possible see him as their companion and leader. A week in every year he set apart for self-examination and for an endeavour to bring all his labours and projects before God in prayer.

The detail of his Rule of Life on its practical side gives some indication of the conditions under which his new work began. It provides " that François de Sales, Bishop of Geneva, shall not wear silken clothing nor anything more costly than before ; his apparel should, however, be always well-fitting and in good condition." It provides further for various particularities of dress, in which anything savouring

[1] C. A. de Sales, *Hist.* i. 327.

of luxury or display is rigorously forbidden; costly and perfumed gloves and elaborate shoes being noted as a special snare. In conformity with this attention to personal attire was his ordering of his household. He had pictured the days that lay ahead in the surroundings he knew so well, and he strove so to frame the picture that nothing in it might disturb or cloud the purpose for which the days were given to him. His servants should be few. A personal attendant for himself and another for the priests of his household, and a cook with two assistants. His livery must be plain, and his servants persons who heard Mass daily and sought the Sacraments at least once a month. Only two rooms in his house were to be carpeted, one to receive guests and the other for public business. During the first half of the time spent at table a devout book was to be read out. On fast days meals to be eaten standing. Not thus had his predecessors, the prince-bishops of Geneva, been wont to comport themselves. Had they done so it is unlikely that Calvin would ever have come into his kingdom.

François de Sales was actuated in this choice of severe simplicity by a sense of fitness. He endeavoured after the unbroken holiness which his vision of his office required; and this could not be brought into accord with any form either of display or of personal luxury. Yet it is worth noticing that his austerity served another purpose, it baffled his enemies and sometimes made them ridiculous. Dwellers in Geneva accepted the idea of a Catholic bishop as they had received it from their fathers, and based upon it new attacks on their old enemy the mission priest of the Chablais. The minister La Faye gave an instance of their mistaken idea of their adversary in a pamphlet of special ferocity, published in 1604, which drew a lurid picture of episcopal self-indulgence. The Bishop was urged to reply, but he showed himself to possess a clearer view of the situation than his advisers. In explaining his refusal he summarised the obvious facts that defeated the accusations made against him.

"The great array of failings for which certainly I merit censure are overlooked," he wrote,[1] "and he charges me

[1] *Œuvres*, XII. 227, p. 296.

only with those from which by the grace of God I am free: ambition, idleness, extravagance over hounds and stabling and other similar absurdities, which things have no attraction for me and are in no way consistent with my circumstances or with the sort of life my office requires."

And in truth the more the attention of honest Calvinists could be directed to the Rule of Life of the Bishop of Geneva the more conversions there were likely to be, for, in its purpose and its detail, it would bear the most penetrating scrutiny. The lines on which this Rule is framed give some suggestion of his mind as he surveyed the prospect of the future. It is not too much to say that he was awestruck before it, and the spirit of awe took more complete possession as he approached his consecration. The ceremony took place in the church at Thorens, the scene of his baptism, on December 8, 1602. Six days later, he made his state entry into Annecy, amid the acclamations of a populace to whom he had been known from childhood.

His reception augured well for the peaceful relation with his flock that he desired, yet his knowledge of their prejudices and failings must have prepared him for opposition to some of his future measures, and the only point where his calculation is likely to have been at fault touched their opinion of himself. They believed him to have brought the virtue of gentleness to perfection, and popular opinion is apt to confound gentleness with weakness. Nor did his first reforming activities as Bishop serve to correct a mistaken estimate, for these were concentrated on the education of the children.

The Church of Saint Dominique stood in the centre of the town; it was hallowed for François by the memory of his First Communion, and he chose it as a place of approach to the children of Annecy. Knowing that his own contemporaries had not been well grounded in the Faith, he determined that the next generation should stand on firmer footing and, to enable them to do so, he instituted the Catechism. After High Mass, at which all the Cathedral Chapter assisted, he explained his purpose to the congregation.[1] Every Sunday afternoon those desirous of instruction

[1] *Année Sainte*, vi. 542.

were to assemble at Saint Dominique. There were special seats set apart for the girls and for the boys, but persons of all ages and all conditions were urged to come. (That forgetfulness should not serve as an excuse for absence, every Sunday in the forenoon a young man in a purple cassock went through the streets, ringing a bell after the manner of a town crier.) After the *Veni Creator* had been said the Bishop entered the pulpit to catechise and give instruction, and he had no difficulty in holding the attention of the children, for he could control without alarming them, and they loved him. Through them he reached their homes, and sometimes gained an intimacy with their elders which might have been hard to achieve by other means. His Sunday Catechism drew a great congregation of grown persons also, both poor and rich, among them his mother, Mme. de Boisy. It is said that he remonstrated with her on the plea that she had been his teacher. To which she replied, " My son, I taught the letter, but you are teaching me the meaning and the spirit of these sacred mysteries of which I knew very little."

It was well that the Sunday afternoons at Saint Dominique won him so many friends. Before the end of his first year as Bishop he had need of loyal adherents, for there were many voices raised against him, and his reputation for mildness was completely shattered. Probably his mind had long been made up as to the use of episcopal authority whenever it passed into his hands, and as soon as the time was ripe he declared his purpose. A dangerous custom prevalent in Latin countries assumed a specially pernicious form in Annecy. It had long been tolerated, but he, both as layman and as priest, had had wider opportunity of studying its disastrous results than any of his predecessors. On the eve of S. Valentine's day the names of men and of maidens were placed in two separate bowls; and couples, according to the drawing of a slip from each, were partners throughout the merry-making of the festival. That one day of licence wrought sufficient evil, doubtless; but the youth of Annecy had their own notion of the indulgence of S. Valentine, and prolonged this promiscuous coupling throughout the year. As the married state was no bar to taking part in this singular lottery, the morals of the town

were sensibly affected by the annual reshuffling, and the new Bishop determined that his silence should not sanction it. He had held his office for only a few weeks when he denounced it from the pulpit of the Cathedral, making it plain that the penalties of disobedience would be rigorously enforced.

Rumours of his intention had been spreading, nevertheless his hearers were astounded. That one whom they had known as a child and regarded as one of themselves should attack the customs of their town—even though the spot chosen for attack might be ill-adapted for defence by well-disposed persons—was a severe shock to a people nourished on tradition ; and they reflected that their acceptance of any measure that interfered with their privileges might open the way to further and more intimate aggression. As the announcement was made at High Mass in the Cathedral it came first, presumably, to those least tempted to the wanton courses that hitherto had sheltered behind the indulgence of S. Valentine, and the Bishop may have expected whole-hearted support from his auditors. He did not get it. We may picture these good people crowding out of the great doors, descending the steep steps in silence, and then, as they reached the safe level of the street, letting the pent-up torrent of words burst forth. They scattered east and west, bearing their news with them, so that there was no need for the official intimation of the Bishop's ruling that followed. And everywhere there was chatter and criticism, and here and there rebellious protest.

They were people who took life vividly. The Savoyard is near akin to the Italian : easily moved to resentment or rejoicing ; and in the towns, where constant danger from invading enemies had gathered far more inhabitants than could conveniently abide within the protecting walls, the contagion of excitement spread rapidly. In Annecy the sunny quays and the wide arcades that line the streets provide facility for gossip and discussion at any hour or under any atmospheric condition, and the action of the new Bishop could be freely canvassed. Perhaps for a time, as he passed about the town on foot, silence would fall at his approach, perhaps he grew accustomed to overhearing the

growl of discontent; whatever he felt, however, of disappointment or surprise at the disloyalty of his flock it did not alter his determination in the slightest. With him consideration came before action; once having reached the point of taking action he never wavered. And so the Feast of S. Valentine was robbed of its excitement, and many a home was saved from the miseries of jealousy and doubt.

A harder task, and one even less congenial to a gentle kindly nature, awaited the new Bishop at a later season of that year. The problem with which he knew that he must deal was of many years' standing, for it resulted from the retreat of the Chapter from Geneva to their refuge at Annecy. He, equally with his predecessors, had fixed his hopes on the surrender of Geneva to the Church, but while he awaited their consummation he intended to fulfil every duty and maintain every right of his position as Bishop. And the Collegiate Chapter of Notre Dame de Liesse at Annecy stood in his way. In the processions which were so important to the faithful it was the privilege of the Canons of Notre Dame to bear the Blessed Sacrament and to take precedence; and the successive Bishops who had made Annecy their residence abstained from any part in the ceremony. François de Sales found such a course intolerable. That he, the Bishop of the diocese, in the full vigour of his youth, should be a mere spectator in ceremonies designed for the glory of Our Lord in His Most Holy Sacrament, appeared as a failure in the obvious duty appertaining to his office. Accordingly, when Trinity Sunday came, he announced from his Cathedral pulpit the order of the Procession of Corpus Christi. It was for him, as Bishop, to be the bearer of the Host, and in attendance on him must come the Cathedral Chapter. Now the members of the ancient Chapter of Notre Dame were immovable in their conviction that the privilege they had always held could not justly be taken from them, and the more likely it appeared that the residence of the Bishop in Annecy would be permanent the less they were inclined to allow him to infringe upon their rights. The feeling of the town was with them, and the syndics presented a formal remonstrance to the Bishop.

It is a curious episode in such a life as that of François de Sales. The assertion of his claim challenged a privilege which he knew to be infinitely precious to those who held it, nevertheless the terms of his demand have no note of conciliation. Clearly he saw the existing conditions as an abuse which the dignity of his office forbade him to tolerate, and the signs of resistance stiffened his determination. He met the remonstrance of the syndics by a reminder that their duty in such a matter was covered by obedience to their Bishop, and would alter nothing in the order he had announced. The Bishop and Chapter of Geneva, so long as they were resident in Annecy, must have place in the Procession of Corpus Christi, and must be given precedence.

The Canons of Notre Dame, confident in the justice of their cause, made the only dignified protest open to them and abstained from any part in the day's ceremonies. When the festival was over they appealed to M. de Nemours, Governor of Annecy, and obtained judgment in their favour. As however the Bishop did not recognisé the Governor's jurisdiction in ecclesiastical matters, this proved an empty triumph and served only to entangle the controversy. For years this dissension smouldered, clouding the friendliness of Annecy and supplying a plausible grievance against the Bishop to those who might desire it. That a bitter feud should arise on a question concerning the worship of God is common enough, but the anomaly becomes more striking when responsibility for it can by any means be laid on one whose intention of charity knew no wavering.

To explain the suggestion of ruthlessness in the conduct of François de Sales at this point, it is well to look back at the experience of his period of missionary labour. In the Chablais audacity had served him better than prudence, and abrupt and sensational measures gave him personal mastery over the minds and spirits of those whom he sought to win. Faced in his new life with an abuse which he regarded as intolerable, he applied the same methods, only to find that directness of dealing, so successful among strangers in the Chablais, was unwelcome to his people at home. As we know him to have been sincerely humble, we may believe that he gained in wisdom with every year of his episcopate,

and it may be that, as he neared its close, the manner of his ruling altered and displayed a tenderness lacking in earlier times. From the beginning, however, despite occasional disagreements, the feeling that prevailed in Annecy was one of love and admiration for their Bishop, and, even when voices were loud against him, a strong minority upheld whatever he might choose to do, secure in their conviction that he could do no wrong.

In the period before the founding of the Visitation, and especially before the publication of his books had aroused such widespread desire for communication with him, François de Sales had a place in the social life of Annecy and shared the plans and interests of those who desired to see the little city a centre of art and learning. The intimacy with Antoine Favre nourished those instincts which had been so assertive in Paris and in Padua, and had had so little opportunity of exercise in the Chablais. Antoine Favre obtained the appointment of President to the Parlement of Annecy in 1597, and from that date till 1610, when he moved to Chambéry on promotion to a higher office, the two friends were in close association.[1] The *Académie Florimontaine* is the memorial of their love of letters and, in days when literary societies were rare and the French Academy had not found its earliest beginning, their effort witnesses to originality as well as to skill in organisation. Its Statutes suggest an exalted estimate of the attainments of their fellow-citizens, present and future, and are characteristic of the outlook of François de Sales. In matters intellectual as well as moral he expected of every man an achievement higher than the highest he had reached. In practice the Academy gave an incentive to study; membership was a privilege; and those admitted were obliged to prove their worthiness by a speech or essay delivered before the assembled members.

Favre offered his house as headquarters, and it is likely that the scheme bore definite fruit in raising the standard of social intercourse in a place where local interests and scandals were likely to be prevailing topics. If the sympathy of the men could be enlisted in such an effort

[1] See Mugnier, *Hist. d'Antoine Favre*, i.

the women (who had no place in the Academy itself) were not likely to be a stumbling-block; and when, in 1606, the opening meeting was held, it must already have done good work in providing a theme for discussion in many a home, in the great houses of the country-side or among the townsfolk. The Bishop in his constant journeys shared his schemes for the good of his people with those who were ready with sympathy; in his letters we find the simplicity that assumes interest, and in this project, as in the graver one that succeeded it, he made all those who loved him partners in his endeavour.

CHAPTER VIII

The Lent at Dijon

The claims of the faithful in Protestant districts continued to be prominent in the Bishop's mind despite the many demands of his people in Annecy. The visit to Gex before his consecration did not suffice for the settlement of the questions between the Calvinists and the Catholics, and in August 1603 he went thither again. He did so at the risk of his life, and it was not a fantastic suspicion that attributed the illness that seized him there to poison ; for so formidable an adversary to intrude himself among determined Calvinists was to invite murder. The fact that he returned alive from this perilous expedition was attributed to miraculous intervention by those about him, and in token of thanksgiving for his recovery he made a pilgrimage on foot from Annecy to Thonon.

His choice of Thonon as his destination may have been prompted by his need of consolation after the disappointments in Gex, for the greatness of result from his years of toil in the Chablais was undeniable. There, where once he had been shunned as a leper, he was now welcomed as a friend and, if the same methods as had won success in one direction could have been adopted in the other, his way lay clear before him. Unfortunately the way was barred by no less a person than the King of France, and his efforts to imbue the King with his own theories were hindered by the jealousy of his sovereign, Charles Emmanuel, who regarded communication with Henri IV as tantamount to intrigue against the interests of Savoy. In addition to these sufficiently cumbrous obstacles to movement we find another impediment characteristic of the times. The revenues ceded by the King of France to the Catholics in

the Province of Gex had already been bestowed on a citizen of Dijon, André Fremyot, titular Archbishop of Bourges, and here again the Bishop of Geneva would have incurred suspicion of disloyalty by open negotiation with a French subject. Thus every endeavour to obtain justice for his neglected people seemed to be thwarted.

It is legitimate to see indications of supernatural guidance as much in his escape from this dilemma as in his preservation from Calvinist menace. Application for leave to visit Dijon on business concerning Gex would certainly have been refused by Charles Emmanuel, but when the Corporation of that city invited the Bishop of Geneva to preach there during Lent he obtained the necessary permission; and despite protests from his diocese that his duty lay at home, he decided that the journey was fully warranted. He seems to have regarded the engagement to preach with misgiving, nevertheless, for life at Annecy gave scant leisure for reflection, and in February, that he might prepare himself, he withdrew to the Castle of Sales. There he made a retreat, the first, probably, that the extreme pressure of his duties had allowed him since his consecration as Bishop.

In his student days the desire for silence and solitude had been firmly implanted. It deepened as his years increased, and again and again in his intimate letters there breaks forth a despairing note of protest against the persistent inroads on his time which robbed him of the opportunity he craved. If we follow the record of his activities as Bishop and forget this baffled longing for times of stillness, we miss understanding of the constant sacrifice his life entailed, and so fail to give full value to his counsels. "We offer ourselves to God so often," he wrote[1]; "we seize every chance of saying: 'Lord, I am Thine; here is my heart,' and when He wishes to make use of us we are so reluctant! How can we say we are His if we will not submit our will to Him? . . . It is not for us to choose as we like, we must see what God wills, and if God wills I should serve Him in one way I must not wish to serve Him in another. . . . If I were not a Bishop it is possible that, knowing all I now know, I should not wish to be one; but

[1] *Œuvres*, XII. 233, p. 345.

being one, I am bound not merely to do all that this hard vocation requires, but I am bound to do it all gladly, to take delight in doing it."

For a moment we catch a glimpse of that steep path to which the servants of God are called. It was no great prize for any man, even though he cherished ambition and loved titles and ceremonies, to be Bishop of Geneva in those days, but for François de Sales, who abhorred dissension and intrigue, and prized seclusion above all earthly delight, the pains of the position far outbalanced any joys that it could offer him. By the end of his first year of office he had discovered the onerous nature of the burden which it was God's will that he should bear, and if, in those days of retreat, he felt a measure of dread as he looked forward, it was not without reason. Although his one purpose was service to the souls entrusted to him, his way was full of pitfalls, and the special complication of warring interests that made his presence in Dijon so imperative was only one out of the many problems with which he had to deal.

Actually he was on the threshold of a new world as he knelt in the chapel of the Castle of Sales during those February days. So much had intervened since he had been privileged with the confidence of Mme. Acarie that he no longer had full knowledge of the aspirations directing her great enterprise. Before her vision really became his own much ground had to be covered, and the weeks at Dijon represent the first stage of his journey.

We have seen that one of the practical reasons that made it desirable for the Bishop to treat personally of the affairs of his diocese was the peculiar difficulty of the claim made by the Archbishop of Bourges to revenues required to support the priests in Gex. The archbishopric of Bourges had been bestowed recently on André Fremyot, a young layman, as a reward for the loyalty of his father, Bénigne Fremyot, president of the Parlement of Dijon. A young layman whose conscience permits him to accept a bishopric is not a promising subject for appeal on a question that involves personal sacrifice in the interests of the Church; yet François de Sales carried his point with André Fremyot, and achieved so strong an influence over him that the diocese

of Bourges as well as the Province of Gex profited by their connection. This in itself would have justified his period of absence, and it proved to be only a small part of the mission awaiting him in Dijon, which owed its chief importance not to Archbishop André but to another member of the Fremyot household.

Jeanne Françoise, the younger daughter of President Fremyot, had married Christophe de Rabutin, Baron de Chantal. After eight very happy years a tragic accident left her a widow. She devoted herself to the training of her four children, and lived under difficult conditions in the house of her father-in-law. Spiritual distress, over and above the insistent pain of her bereavement, was weighing upon her, and she came to her father's house for the Lent of 1604, hoping for solace, yet with no clear idea of the form that it might take.

The Lenten sermons of François de Sales made a profound impression in Dijon. Day after day devout listeners thronged the Sainte Chapelle, and he could hardly satisfy the claims made on him by individuals. He paid enthusiastic tribute to the fervour of the citizens, who were prepared by the habit of regular prayer and worship to make full use of any fresh opportunity of advance. Yet where all were responsive there was one whose rapt attention suggested that her need surpassed that of her neighbours. This was Mme. de Chantal, the young widow, who sat always in the same place and drank in every word. He told her afterwards [1] that in so far as his teaching had been the word of God she did well to listen eagerly, but evidently he had not attached very great importance to his own method of presentation and, at the time, her complete absorption surprised him. He inquired of André Fremyot who the lady might be, and soon afterwards met her in her father's house.

At Annecy, in familiar places with a constant routine of duties and a circle of old friends always eager to welcome the chance of intercourse, it was hard to break away from accustomed lines of thought and practice. Moreover, although the people of Annecy knew themselves to be

[1] *Œuvres*, XII. 221, p. 277.

privileged in the possession of their Bishop, he had not found the same response from individuals as met him in Dijon. For a few of these strangers who accorded him so warm a welcome did seem to have had already some glimpses of the vision he was pursuing, and for them he found it possible to frame in words those inner musings that had been latent in his mind since suggestion of them came to him in Paris. The teaching that the Spanish Carmelites were to bring with them had not yet reached France, and there is no evidence of any link between Mme. Acarie and Mme. de Chantal or any of her friends. The response that met François de Sales in Dijon was due to the remarkable prevalence—it may be termed the fashion —of devout practice in that city, while the position of Mme. de Chantal was individual to herself. She craved that new knowledge of the way of prayer for which he groped and, in striving to impart all that he had to her, he made advance himself. Theirs was a spiritual partnership to which her contribution was essential, not only by reason of her innate capacity but because her response to every demand he made upon her was wholly generous. Later he found generosity of a like order in many others and it was his part to kindle into ardent and undying flame the dormant fire in many a faithful soul, yet it was given to Ste. Chantal to meet his claim upon her in such wise that she gave it back and it became a claim upon himself. There was an association of development between them, and she had her part in every stage of his period of discovery. The Order of the Visitation, and the striving after perfection for which it stands, came into being in the mind of François de Sales because he was privileged to watch the great endeavour of Jeanne de Chantal. In guiding her, moreover, he found his skill in guidance, and from the measure of her attainment learnt that his standard for his new Foundation should not stop short of the highest.

During Lent in Dijon, however, all this was still in a remote future and his time was fully occupied with his preaching, his confessional, and his intercourse with the friendly townsfolk who had given him so eager a reception. And it was only during the last week before his return to

Annecy that Mme. de Chantal asked for personal help from him. He had been a frequent guest at her father's table, and she had learnt to know the man as distinct from the preacher. The more she watched and listened the stronger grew her confidence, until at length a great conviction that he could bring light into the darkness that enveloped her banished misgiving, and she asked—as so many others, men and women, had been doing—for an opportunity of unburdening her grief.

The diocese of Geneva could not spare its Bishop a day longer than the appointed period, and yet it was plain that this new charge made a demand which written communication would not meet. Therefore the autumn after he left Dijon he arranged that she and two of her intimate friends, Mme. Brulart and Rose Bourgeois, Abbess of Puits d'Orbe, should come to Saint-Claude, in the French quarter of his diocese, where he and Mme. de Boisy were due on pilgrimage. He relied upon this meeting to lay the solid foundation of that spiritual alliance which he had determined should exist between them. He prepared for it as for a very important event, and his after references show that he held it as a landmark. She made a life confession before him and he gave her in writing a solemn undertaking that, so far as the duties of his office permitted, he would be responsible for her spiritual guidance. By this he established their relation of confessor and penitent on lines that only departed from the normal because each possessed exceptional gifts. The unusual element, which at once inspired her and made her fearful, lay in his frank acknowledgment that he drew help from her. "Every friendship has some characteristic making it different from others; that which I have for you holds something special that is of infinite consolation to me, and from which, to say the whole truth, I derive extreme benefit."[1] So he wrote while their friendship was in its first year, and so, again and again, in varying words, he wrote in the years that followed.

In considering this most important epoch in the life of François de Sales he must be realised as being what he is —essentially and inevitably a priest. To the eyes of the

[1] *Œuvres*, XII, 234, p. 354.

onlooker it may seem that, through a formidable array of opposing circumstances, by courage and patience and determination, he had forced his claim to ordination, but a closer view shows his real self as inseparable from his priesthood. For him priesthood entailed devotion to the service of God, continuous and unreserved. This had taken active form in his labours to reclaim the Protestants and in his organisations for the faithful within the diocese; but, behind this expression in activity, it stood for an abiding state. We have seen that, in the Rule of Life made in retreat before his ordination, he had aspired to maintain each hour of every day on the level of that in which he made his daily offering of the Mass. It was to that note he endeavoured to attune his mind in the midst of ceaseless pressure of affairs, and this aspiration, held, as he held it, steadfastly, imposed on him a certain isolation even in the midst of associates who did no discredit to their sacred calling. Possibly, having once assured himself that those about him saw life from a very different angle, he accepted solitude and would never have emerged from it had he remained in his habitual environment. In Paris there had been many opportunities of communication with souls well able to respond to all that was springing up within him; but, as we have seen, Paris had brought a great influx of new impressions, and his opportunity of sharing in that endeavour of prayer-discovery to which he had been admitted was so short-lived that he did not understand all it implied until long afterwards.

Dijon came two years later. Looking back on it he wrote [1] that there he had first learnt to associate individuals with the "us" and "we" of his daily petition. And this chance avowal suggests the real experience in Dijon. He had found there a group of men and women who set real tralue on the treasures he was seeking to amass, and thence-showard he knew the infinite delight of sharing that which I had cherished as a secret hitherto. And with Mme. de remoutal he formed so strong a link of spiritual comradeship preachie and she could be partners in further quest. This friendly or more than happiness. He found in it, as he told And it wa

[1] *Œuvres*, XII. 234, p. 354.

her, "extreme benefit." For her the happiness was so intense that she could hardly be persuaded to accept it; but his deeper knowledge freed him from misgivings. Perhaps while he did not formulate, even to himself, his vision of the future, he did foresee that, on ahead, the path they trod might become so steep and narrow that those who ventured to pursue it must ascend alone. Seeing that this must be, he could rejoice in all simplicity over companionship upon the way, for just so long as two might follow it abreast.

CHAPTER IX

The Peace of God

It is only after the Lent at Dijon, in 1604, that the link can be established between the François de Sales of tradition and the exiled Bishop who was known to the faithful in the remote places of his diocese for the courage that no peril or hardship could defeat, and to the Calvinists as their most successful and most indomitable antagonist. After his return from Dijon the demand for his great gift as a spiritual director became increasingly insistent, and the fame of his preaching spread ; and so the figure of the mission priest who risked his life hourly in the Chablais grows dim. The François de Sales of this later time, the aristocrat, the man of culture, the admired preacher, established in the fortified city of Annecy, may seem to have little in common with the intrepid champion of the Faith to whom the Castle of Allinges once gave shelter. Yet if we look more closely we find that the Bishop of Geneva had need of physical courage in almost equal degree with the missionary of Thonon. One incident in particular will serve to show that hours spent in the confessional or, pen in hand, devoted to the scruples and difficulties of women-penitents, had not dulled the instinct of the sportsman that was his inheritance.

The occasion was a demand for his presence on the French territory of Gex when the Rhone had flooded its banks and made the ordinary route impassable. The other road lay through the city of Geneva, which should have presented as serious an impediment to the passage of the Bishop as a wilderness of waters. The Bishop himself thought otherwise, however, and so was enabled to reach the appointed place by the appointed time. He referred

to his journey in a letter to Antoine Favre, as follows : [1] "You will have heard how, led by my guardian angel, I crossed Geneva. I did this chiefly to prove that I was not afraid to do it, and, to show that 'He that walketh uprightly walketh surely,' without any concealment of my rank and condition. It is not anything to be proud of, no, for it was not a very prudent resolve, but, as you know, prudence was never my peculiar virtue."

In fact, he presented himself at the city gate with his small suite, and caused his vicar-general to reply to the general question of the seneschal that he was "My lord the Bishop," and to the more detailed question "My lord the Bishop of this diocese." Whereupon there was inscribed in the register—"*Monsieur François de Sales. Évêque de ce diocese*," and the Bishop of Geneva, having complied with all the formalities required at the entrance of travellers, proceeded to ride composedly across the city, undisturbed by his knowledge that the majority of the inhabitants regarded him with deadly hatred, and that their existing laws would have justified his capture at any moment during his progress. He was a conspicuous figure, and he and his companions wore the dress that marked their office. He says that most of the passers-by, both men and women, greeted him respectfully, and so he reached the farther gate and rode away unmolested.[2]

Probably he owed his immunity to the astonishment of the citizens. They were, literally, too much surprised to decide on action until the opportunity had passed. And he, for once yielding to an impulse, had the adventure that he craved and did not pay for it. It was not, as he said, "anything to be proud of," for the responsibility of his office made it culpable to run so grave a hazard, yet the episode is one that we could ill afford to spare from the record of his doings. There is always a tendency to depict the great examples of holy living as so practised in self-repression that the urgings of impulse and desire had no real part in their experience, and thus to set them on a plane above the reach of average humanity. In the case of François de Sales it is hard to find evidence of any occasion

[1] *Œuvres*, XIV. 547, p. 196. [2] *Ibid.* 559, p. 224.

when he failed in the virtues of ordinary life. He lived austerely and worked without ceasing; in an age when intrigue was customary his integrity was above reproach; his charity and patience in all spiritual relationships never flagged or wavered; all this is indisputable, and it might appear that his surrender of himself had been made so fully, and so completely accepted, that the assertions of the natural man had ceased. Thus the sudden reappearance of the sportsman and the soldier in this foolhardy transit of Geneva is welcome. The adventure is no blur on the record of a saint, but it shows a desire for the thrill of risk as still surviving when he was forty-two, and suggests that the rigorous management of time and strict fulfilment of every duty of his high office may have demanded a constant renewal of self-discipline, a protracted secret struggle, of which the outward record of his life affords no indication.

We find proof of the imminence of his peril in the suspicions that were directed towards him when the story of his escapade became public. So impossible did it seem to his contemporaries for him, undisguised and unprotected, to pass scathless through the Calvinist furnace if he were a loyal subject of Savoy and a faithful son of the Church, that his enemies were able to gain a hearing for their calumnies. In 1615, the report of his conference with the Archbishop of Lyons on the constitutions of the Visitation Order was twisted into evidence that he was plotting with the King of France against his sovereign.[1] Yet the malice that could depict him as a confederate of the Protestant rebels in Geneva was even more ingenious; and he seems to have made vigorous protest against the Duke's credulity.[2] Nevertheless—the accusation being so fantastic and his own innocence so complete—he found a certain joy in this form of danger. "Do not think I am in distress," he wrote to Mme. de Chantal, when the menace of the Duke's displeasure loomed large, "nothing could disturb me less." And to one and another his words imply an amused acknowledgment that he has brought his troubles on himself by "*ce beni passage que je fis à Genève.*" Had it been to do again, doubtless he would have found another route to Gex,

[1] *Œuvres*, XVII. 1132, p. 88. [2] *Ibid.* XIV. 560, p. 227.

yet it is by no means plain that he regretted his defiance of danger, however severe might be the criticisms it brought upon him.

In fact, a timid man was not suited to the bishopric of Geneva, and if the predecessors of François de Sales had possessed more courage the surrender of the diocese to Calvinism might have been less complete. The natural course of duty involved very perilous journeys, and the episcopal visitation of a district including part of Mont-Blanc and the Pic du Géant, at a period when roads were bad or non-existent and no provision was made for travellers, had small attraction even for his adventurous spirit. When, in October 1605, the new Bishop set out for his first exploration of the remote quarters of his diocese, he did not pretend that the prospect pleased him. The date of starting, owing to an endless stream of engagements, had been postponed later than was advisable, and it is plain that he had to brace himself to the effort involved. He wrote [1] to Mme. de Chantal that he foresaw every kind of cross at every turn. "My flesh shrinks, but my spirit must adore them."

For six weeks, when days were short and weather treacherous, his pilgrimage among the mountains continued; and at the end he sums up his impressions, as he had confided his forebodings, to Mme. de Chantal.

"I reached here Saturday night," he wrote [2] on the last day of November, "after having ridden across country six weeks on end without stopping anywhere except for half a day. Usually I preached every day and often twice a day. And, such is the goodness of God, that I have never felt better! All those crosses which I foresaw proved to be palms and olive trees when I drew near; all that I thought was vinegar proved to be honey, or something like it. Only it was actually the case that, except on horseback or in an hour of wakefulness at night, I have never had a moment for self-review or to see where my own heart was tending, so closely did important affairs succeed upon each other."

It was a fruitful pilgrimage and of service to the Bishop as well as to his flock: "I feel that my love for souls is

[1] *Œuvres*, XIII. 316, p. 113. [2] *Ibid.* 320, p. 125.

greater than it has been," he wrote,[1] a few weeks later,— " and I have almost won the heart of my people. There is always something lacking, for I blunder through ignorance and folly, and because I do not always know the best way to set to work."

The records of these visitations, begun in the second year of his episcopate and continued till his life ended, bring home to us the separate life of each parish, the differing relations between priest and people, the prevalence of evil in one place, of piety in another. Sometimes an earnest curé is seen struggling against the apathy and vice that permeate his flock; sometimes we find the faithful appealing against a pastor who will not guide or feed them. And while his vicar-general and his secretary busied themselves over making inventories and examining the structural condition of church and presbytery, it was the part of the Bishop to test the foundation on which the spiritual life of the community depended. A day, or perhaps only half a day, gave little scope for such an enterprise (the autumn record of 1605 gives 70 visits in 46 days), yet there is no impression of hurry. Important affairs might indeed " follow so closely upon each other " that the Bishop had no time for himself, but he does not suggest that they passed too closely for each to receive its share of his consideration. As he came to each of these small centres of life he gave himself to it as he was wont to give himself to each individual soul. For the hours that he remained there, the interests of the inhabitants, their traditions and desires and prejudices and sins, became the absorbing occupation of his mind. Problems of conduct and causes of quarrel were brought for his decision, and he put himself at the disposal of all who needed him. He preached from every pulpit, he catechised the children, he heard the confession of every penitent who desired to approach him, and said Mass in every village where he passed the night.

Having thus given himself to his people without reserve, at every stage of a journey whose stages were so manifold, the joy with which he looks back upon his progress may easily be understood. The routine of duties described to

[1] *Œuvres*, XIII. 328, p. 139.

him beforehand had suggested a prospect very different from the reality; but it was his own genius that swept away the fence of formality and gave opportunity of human relation with him to every one of his flock. That free giving took toll of his strength and energy, however, and the exuberant health of which he wrote to Mme. de Chantal did not last for very long. He spent Advent, 1605, at Annecy in the retirement that illness sometimes forced upon him; devoted the first month of the new year to the accumulation of work entailed by absence, and then set out for Chambéry. At that time his mind was taxed by uncertainty as to future plans and by many problems of personal conduct requiring decision.

At Chambéry the problems were of a very different kind from those demanded by his work in Annecy, for there he came nearer to the Duke. If he offended Charles Emmanuel his usefulness might be checked by small acts of interference; if he so pleased him as to be publicly distinguished by his favour he risked incurring the jealousy of courtiers and officials who could find means to thwart his use of favour for the welfare of his flock. Calumny pursued him almost to the hour of his death, yet, as he desired to be at peace with all men, it must have come to birth in the imagination of the envious. When he obeyed the call to preach Lent in 1606, he knew the atmosphere that he must breathe was poisonous to simplicity. Before the ordeal, he needed, for body and for mind, the preparation of Retreat. He wrote of it characteristically to Mme. de Chantal.[1]

"To-morrow before daybreak I start for Chambéry where the Father Rector of the Jesuits[2] awaits me. He is to give me refuge during the five or six days I have reserved before Lent for the quieting of my poor soul in the confusion caused by so much business. There, my Daughter, I intend to turn myself inside out and restore all the pieces to their proper place with the help of this good Father who is amazingly devoted to me and to my welfare. And herewith, my Daughter, I will tell you something of myself, since you wish it so much and assure me that it would be useful to you. But this is for you, for you only. The

[1] *Œuvres*, XIII. 328, p. 139. [2] Père Fourier.

business of this diocese comes not in streams but in torrents. I can say to you in all honesty that since I set forth on my visitation I have had unceasing work. The consolation is that it is all for the glory of God."

Lent in the two previous years, in Dijon and at La Roche, had drawn to him souls of remarkable spiritual capacity who owed to his guidance their awakening to the privilege reserved for them. At Chambéry the service required was more general. He touched vast numbers of persons who remained unknown, and, as the Bishop of Grenoble desired it, he held an ordination, by his own wish hearing the confessions of the candidates. Besides all this he held himself at the disposal of all the penitents who might seek him in the intervals of his preaching, yet in the little band of those most closely known to him there is not one whose connection began during that Lent at Chambéry.

He could snatch only two months' pause for residence at Annecy before he set out again on his visitation journeying. This, evidently, taxed his resolution more than any other duty of his office, and again he acknowledges "a host of vain apprehensions like the involuntary shivering that comes with the coming of cold weather." [1] The constant moving from place to place demanded real self-surrender from one who loved retirement and study, and at each halt, as on the first occasion, every faculty of mind and heart was called into play that the pastor might gain real knowledge of his flock. In addition to this strain, inseparable from the routine of episcopal visits, his actual road, in the summer of 1606, lay through the wildest part of his mountainous diocese. At that period no one would have dreamed of regarding the ascent of ice-bound peaks as a pastime, and for a native of Savoy the region of perpetual snow had no allurements. Yet this second journey held as great a measure of inspiration for François as the first had done, and again he bore testimony in a letter to Mme. de Chantal. It was to her he had confessed his shrinking from the prospect of those mountain journeys, and to her he related the incident that seized on his imagina-

[1] *Œuvres*, XIII. 352, p. 192.

tion. A shepherd seeking one of his flock had perished in a snowdrift. His eagerness to trace the footmarks of the truant had made him heedless of his own safety. And that mountain tragedy appeared to the Bishop as an object lesson throwing his weaknesses into relief. "How sharp a stab at me, my daughter," he wrote [1]; "how is it that I am so sluggish in seeking for my sheep?"

Perhaps he brought more burning zeal to the labour of that summer visitation because of the challenge which the peasant's death among the snows conveyed to him. In October, as once more he drew near Annecy, he acknowledged the pressure of work and business to be so great that he could do no more. He had given up all attempt to discriminate among the claims upon him or to maintain any method of dealing with them, and he says that every night when he went to bed "neither body nor brain could make another movement, so completely weary was I." He had maintained this ceaseless activity for more than four months when the festival of All Saints summoned him back to his Cathedral, and there the tide of ordinary business—perforce neglected for so long—ran high. It was given to him, however, to learn in the midst of tumult the lesson more ordinarily studied in retreat.

And here we are touching one of the landmarks of his spiritual history. Two years and a half had passed since the Lent at Dijon. He had seen Mme. de Chantal twice in that interval, at Saint-Claude and at Thorens, and the spiritual interchange of thought by correspondence had become more and more intimate. At first she had dire need of his assistance; only gradually had the message that she held for him declared itself, and, to assimilate it, a time of quiet seemed a necessity. He did not get that time of quiet; rather there had been moments when dismay, that verged upon despair, had touched him as he faced the torrent of affairs, each with its attendant danger of distraction, that threatened to submerge him. He has left us no record of the occasion or of the method that he chose for the self-scrutiny or the self-steadying that was needed. Perhaps in the long hours on foot or in the saddle, during

[1] *Œuvres*, XIII. 366, p. 224.

his second pilgrimage, he fought and won the difficult battle with the natural man, whose eagerness in service so easily confounds itself with desire for accomplishment. Perhaps the snow-crowned peaks, that towered above him as he journeyed, preached to him of the folly of haste and anxiety and calculation. By whatever means it came to pass it is certain that, in the crowded year that contained his Lent at Chambéry, he found the clue to a hard problem of the spiritual life.

In November a Papal Jubilee had entailed a fortnight of preaching and ceremonial at Annecy: "This has kept me busy," he wrote,[1] "and encouraged also, by reason of the number of life confessions and turnings of conscience, over and above the sea of ordinary occupations. In the midst of all this (I can say this to you!) I live in entire peace of heart, resolved to labour henceforward faithfully and diligently for the glory of God, offering myself first of all, and afterwards all that is entrusted to me."

Thus simply was his discovery announced. Yet we may believe that he recognised the greatness of the treasure he had found and thenceforward held it as most precious of possessions. He had many difficult moments awaiting him: when the fate of plans made for the glory of God and upheld by infinite toil came near collapse; when the fortunes of those he loved were in jeopardy; when his own reputation, and with it his power for good, was threatened. And sometimes his judgment seems to have failed him and he made mistakes. When he did so he had to bear the consequences as others do. Yet for him misgivings and regrets, though they might be real enough, were only on the surface; underneath, calm and immutable, was that "entire peace of heart."

Since the months of association with Mme. Acarie, new possibilities had existed for him, and they had been forced into shape to meet the need of Jeanne de Chantal. His relation to this privileged soul quickened his spiritual sensibility. He could not give what she required if his heart were set on anything less than the highest, and no charge that belonged to him as Bishop of the diocese seemed

[1] *Œuvres*, XIII. 371, p. 236.

to come more directly from the Hand of God than did this task of individual guidance.

The year 1607 was not marked outwardly by any memorable events. He consolidated his work for the Church in the Chablais. He preached to his own people at Annecy. He wrote at length for the direction of troubled souls when appeal was made to him from a distance. Yet while he gave himself so freely his innermost being was fixed upon one central thought, of which the world around him had no cognisance. Vague aspirations had formed themselves into a plan, offered at every stage with his daily offering of himself and his desires, until at length uncertainties took flight and he saw his way plainly. When he reached that stage, feeling the time had come when his reflections need no longer be in secret, he invited Mme. de Chantal to Annecy, and arranged that Mme. de Boisy should be ready to receive her. The time had arrived for a decisive movement, and he had that to say for which pen and paper could not be medium. She came at Pentecost.

If we would realise the boldness of the plan which found eventual expression in the Order of the Visitation it is needful only to recall the position of Mme. de Chantal at this period. She was the mother of four children, an important person in her husband's family and in her own and, to all appearance, her feet were very firmly planted in the world. Only the Carmelites in Dijon and François de Sales himself had any real comprehension of that yearning for the religious life which had long been stirring within her. This desire of hers had received no encouragement from without: it was her own insistence that forced recognition of it, and her director had yielded only gradually. It is true that she started on the arduous journey to Savoy from Burgundy in obedience to his summons and that she had no knowledge of his design, but she believed that he would give her a decision as to the future awaiting her, and she came with entire confidence in the wisdom of his ruling.

In her own memoir she tells of the process of testing applied to her, and of her way of meeting it, which convinced her director of her complete submission. When he was satisfied on this point, he unfolded the plan that had

ripened in the months of the foregoing winter. He had planned—in the words of his own description—"an Order where the charity and gentleness of Jesus Christ shall rule, where the weak and infirm can be admitted, which shall be able to give attendance to the sick and to visit the poor." He believed this to be a need fulfilled by no existing Order.

"As I listened," says Mme. de Chantal, "I felt within myself a great response, and such light and sweetness that I became certain this was an intimation of the Will of God."

When that momentous interview was over Mme. de Chantal returned to her ordinary duties and responsibilities. Outwardly conditions had not altered; yet Madame la Baronne, châtelaine of the Castle of Montelon, hostess in Dijon for her father President Fremyot, was at heart already the first Novice of the Visitation.

CHAPTER X

The Diocese of Geneva

François de Sales is supposed to have declared that he "laboured for seventeen years to train three priests to set the standard for the clergy of the diocese and succeeded only to the extent of one and a half," [1] and that it was only when he lost hope of doing anything with the clergy that he turned to the laity, and devoted his energies to the founding of the Visitation.

While the accuracy of the legend may be questioned, it is valuable as a reminder of the difficulties encountered by the Bishop of Geneva in his efforts as administrator. We have seen the dauntless energy with which he visited his flock in the most remote places, so that he gained real knowledge of the conditions in each parish and could form some estimate of the needs which remained unsupplied. In 1606, when he had held his office four years, he sent a report [2] to Pope Paul V by the hand of his brother Jean François, and from that unvarnished statement we can re-create the background of humiliating poverty against which each new enterprise of the exiled Bishop should be set to be seen in true proportion.

Seventy-one years had passed since Geneva became the stronghold of the Calvinists, and Catholic resentment could not remain at fever heat for so long a period. To François de Sales, sixth of the line of exiled Bishops, the tragedy of the position lay in the acquiescence of the faithful, rather than in their helplessness; and in his statement to His Holiness this note of tragedy is plain. The Faith was being dishonoured constantly within the limits of his diocese,

[1] Quoted by Mgr. Bougand, *Hist. de S. Vincent de Paul*, I. p. 176.
[2] See *Opuscules, État de l'Église de Genève*, p. 333, edit. 1883.

and while that cloud remained the work for souls could only win part of its reward. Such was the sorrowful conviction that shadowed all his plans and efforts. And yet he had fair cause for satisfaction when he surveyed his territory. "There are five hundred and ninety parish churches," he reports, "and in four hundred and fifty of these the Sacraments are administered and the people are instructed in the Catholic Faith. The people are real Catholics with the tradition of piety." And so eager were they that the number of their parish priests was insufficient for their needs, because of the increase of the population in districts difficult of access.

"This diocese of Geneva lies amid a number of very high mountains," he wrote, "and on the heights of most of them there are populous villages. For their spiritual consolation our predecessors built churches and, on Festivals, priests dwelling in the valleys are always obliged to climb thither to celebrate the most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. At first when there were few inhabitants this occasional visit sufficed . . . but now that God has increased the people, and their enterprise and industry have changed desert places into corn-field and pasture, it is to be desired that there should be a guardian for their souls. . . . I myself have seen and visited a parish church on a high mountain which can only be reached by clambering with feet and hands. It is six miles away from another church served by the same priest, who says Mass in each every Sunday. With what fatigue, with what danger, with what unseemliness and confusion goes without saying, particularly in the winter time when these districts are completely covered in ice and snow. I had no sooner arrived, than there arose murmurs from all directions, from men and women, great and small: 'What does it avail that we obey all the laws of the Church, that we pay our tithes and dues, if we are given no shepherd, and remain like a flock of sheep that can find no pasture?' The fact being that the neighbouring Abbey claims all that they pay. It is true that the Bishop should regulate such questions, but it is no easy matter, for immediately, the Abbot resorts to legal process."

We shall see that he touched here on one of the great

abuses that hindered just administration; yet the release of the money intended for the parish priest would not have served as a complete solution of the problem of neglected parishes; the priests themselves were insufficient in number and lacking in capacity. "There is not a diocese in Christendom," he wrote, "in greater need of a Seminary than this of Geneva."

The difficulty of obtaining priests was not confined to the diocese of Geneva. The sixteenth century had not been fruitful in vocations, and the efforts of those who laboured to raise the standard of the priesthood as well as to increase the number of aspirants could not have immediate result; it was only in the matter of money that François de Sales was peculiarly straitened. The Calvinists had seized the Cathedral revenues and he received only a thousand crowns annually to cover all the costs of his high office, while the thirty Canons had forty crowns apiece. And he suffered still from that great abuse, due to the confusion of the Protestant invasion, when the Religious Orders obtained possession of funds intended to benefit those who ministered to the Catholic people. And so there was little inducement to cautious parents of the wealthier class to provide the Bishop of Geneva with the material he coveted. He desired the flower of the youth of Savoy from which to fashion priests who would set the standard for the rest—and he did not obtain it. A sentence from a letter to his brother,[1] written in the seventeenth year of his episcopate, tells its own tale. A nomination for a court appointment was in question and, having suggested one name, he added: "otherwise I know not where to look, for we have no well born priest who is not defective in physical capacity and appearance, or else in intelligence, or is too old, or in some way unsuited for a charge in which our royal mistress requires efficiency."

It would be false to infer from this that François showed any preference for priests of noble birth. The best-equipped from every grade of society were the best suited in his eyes for the high privilege of Holy Orders, and he preferred simplicity to learning, and held the affectations popular

[1] *Œuvres*, XIX. 1658, p. 223.

among the pulpit orators of the day in particular abhorrence. From the first he aimed at intimate knowledge of each of his clergy and strove to impress upon them his own ideals of priesthood. With this in view, when he summoned a Synod in October 1603, he published before the assembly the rules which he considered expedient and to which he required obedience.

It is needless to dwell on the laxity and disorder, so prevalent in the churches of France, by which the clergy of Savoy had been contaminated. The new Bishop had gathered experience during his years as Provost, and some of the rules he laid down testify to his knowledge of the dangers to be shunned. For instance, no curé might enter a tavern in his parish or play a game in any public place; and, that there might be no evasion, he appointed supervisors, or arch-priests, to watch over an allotted number of parishes. Yet he was far more anxious to win affection, and to be "a father in God," than to appear as a disciplinarian. The work of a bishop, he insisted,[1] availed nothing unless supported by the work of a curé, and all real achievement for the good of souls depended on complete unity of purpose between the two. He gave them careful teaching, also, to help them in the administration of the Sacraments, and those who grasped the spirit of his preparation for approach to the Holy Sacrifice,[2] perforce were lifted within measurable distance of the level he desired for them.

His Notice to Confessors, while intended for the clergy of his diocese, reached a much wider public, and in addition to its inherent value it is of extraordinary interest as a revelation of the mind of the writer. We find here the root from which sprang his power as a physician of souls. He wrote in 1603, and every year that followed added to his experience as a confessor, yet without altering his view that the quality of charity, above all others, was needful for that office. For their interior disposition towards their penitents, for their outward demeanour, and for their method in direction, he gives a series of instructions to his

[1] *Déposition de Michel Favre.*
[2] *Opuscules*, p. 270.

clergy which none could follow unless the spirit of charity possessed him.

Complaints arose sometimes against the Bishop. He could show himself to be strict where it was the fashion to be easy-going, and unless a candidate for ordination showed a measure of intelligence and industry no family interest would secure acceptance. Nor would any intervention move him in matters of patronage. There is a story of a young man of high rank who demanded a vacant cure of value. The Bishop, opening his Missal and chancing on the demand made for the sons of Zebedee, required the applicant to translate Our Lord's reproof to their ambition. *Nescitis quid petatis.* He was met with an avowal of ignorance coupled with a reiterated claim on the good living. For such cases (and they recurred to the end of his episcopate) he had strengthened his position at the outset by appointing a Council over which he presided, and to which every appointment was referred. Perhaps, having established this safeguard against an inclination to over-kindness in public matters, he felt himself at liberty to follow his natural disposition in personal dealing and to show his clergy what the practice of charity implied. One instance of his indifference to the ordinary rules of prudence when the cause seemed to him sufficient may be given.

A certain curé, whose conduct had long been a cause of scandal, approached him in the course of one of his visitation journeys, drawn to him by the impression of his holiness. Having till then refused to admit his guilt, the culprit made full and complete confession, declaring himself ready to accept whatever penalty might be exacted. S. François there and then gave practical demonstration of his belief that a complete restoration can be achieved by the way of penitence. He required a new life under the old conditions and the fulfilment of duties hitherto neglected, and, that the reinstatement might be public and the example of the Bishop have full influence with the parishioners of the delinquent, he chose him for a time as his confessor, resorting to his tribunal at moments when his church was likely to be most frequented. Thus, guided by the Holy Spirit, S. François performed a miracle and, where he had

mourned over an evil priest, he gave thanks for a faithful shepherd of souls.

Both flocks and pastors varied widely under the differing conditions of that vast diocese, and no instruction upon preaching from the Bishop to his clergy has survived. Instead, we have his mind upon this matter in a letter to André Fremyot, brother of Mme. de Chantal. The Archbishop of Bourges was ordained priest in 1604, and his first Mass, said on Maundy Thursday, was served by the Bishop of Geneva. The following autumn, seized with misgiving as to his capacity for guiding others, he applied to his friend and mentor at Annecy for advice.

" No one ought to preach without three qualifications," S. François answered, " good conduct, sound doctrine, and a real vocation. . . . As to doctrine: a great man of letters said the best method of learning and becoming learned was to teach; by preaching one becomes a preacher. I would add only this: a preacher will always have enough knowledge so long as he does not pretend to more than he possesses. . . . The aim is the significant point in every act. . . . What then is the aim of the preacher in the act of preaching? His aim and his intention must be to do that which Our Lord did when He came into this world; and this is what He said Himself: ' I come that ye may have life and have it more abundantly.' The aim of the preacher then is that sinners destroyed by iniquity should be restored by righteousness, that the righteous who have the life of the spirit should have it more abundantly, growing more and more towards perfection."

This ideal was not likely to be achieved by the easy-going, or by one who sought applause, and François de Sales makes it clear that, in his opinion, the preaching will be of none effect unless supported by the personal conduct of the preacher. The real secret was " to be in love oneself with the truths to be taught and explained to others. The greatest art is to use no art at all. The fire of our words must be due not to shouts and gesticulations, but to inward conviction; they must come from the heart rather than from the lips. You may say what you like, but heart speaks to heart, and tongue only to ears."

And every hour of every day must conform with the hours in the pulpit. The layman who hunted and played cards and enjoyed evening amusements might be blameless, but it would need a hundred thousand extenuating circumstances to justify a preacher sharing in such things. After doing so, to preach mortification was a mockery.

S. François saw every detail of the office of a priest in its supernatural aspect, but his view of the responsibility and sacredness of preaching had special gravity. He had a habit of pausing at the beginning of a sermon, and looking across the assembly ranged before him for a few silent moments. At Annecy, where observation of his doings was closer than elsewhere, one of the Cathedral Chapter ventured to ask him what his silence signified. "I salute the guardian-angel of each one of my audience," he answered, "and I beg him to make the heart under his care ready for my words. Very great favours have come to me by this means." And he preferred, when such a plan was possible, to go straight from the Altar to the pulpit.

He did not urge the practice of fasting and mortification on his clergy except in so far as the Church required it, and there was nothing spectacular about his own austerity, his neglect of meals and of necessary hours of rest being prompted by extreme eagerness in other directions, rather than by a deliberate intention of self-denial. In the Lent of the year 1607 he was at Annecy, preaching twice a day, officiating at every Cathedral ceremony, assiduous in his confessional, and more than usually indifferent as to opportunities for eating. M. Déage, observing him, became apprehensive that his health would fail, and scolded him for his folly in a manner that recalled the days of tutorship. The student in Padua had been more submissive than the Bishop in Annecy, however, for the old man's warning provoked only laughter.

"Ah, M. Déage," said François, "you would get too vain if a pupil of yours became a martyr, having been privileged to sacrifice himself for the Glory of God and the salvation of souls! But there is no fear of that! You brought me up too luxuriously and made me too great a coward to win you an honour that is so rare in these days!" [1]

[1] *Année Sainte*, iv. p. 331.

The love of luxury and the surrender to sloth were responsible for the worst plague spots in his diocese, and it is not surprising if he reacted to the opposite excess. He tried to see Geneva as the root and centre of all things evil. "What Rome is to the Angels and the Catholics she is to heretics and devils," he said. Yet, in fact, there was another source of poison more insidious and more deadly. However great the damage to religion in Savoy wrought by the open attack of the Calvinists, the worst effect of violence was less to be dreaded than the slow paralysis of spiritual life for which the corruption of the monastic orders was responsible. Bitter experience in the Chablais prepared François de Sales for the discoveries of his first years as Bishop. The letter to Pope Paul V, already quoted, reports on the condition of the monasteries. There were six of these, at Aulph, Hautecombe, Chesery, Abondance, Sixt, and Entremont,—where the title and emoluments of the Abbot had passed into secular hands. François de Sales makes this grim comment [1]: "It is matter for astonishment that the professed religious in the abbeys and priories of this diocese should be so completely devoid of discipline; the only exceptions are the Carthusians and the begging friars. With all the rest gold is exchanged for refuse, wine is weakened to water or corrupted to poison. And they give occasion for the enemy of Our Lord to blaspheme, saying: 'Where is the God of a people like these?' The evil may be remedied either by sending better monks of some other Order into the monasteries, or by submitting them to a disciplinary visit. . . . As regards the visit it is quite useless to entrust it to the Superiors of these Orders, for the monks and abbots of Cluny, of Savigny, and of Saint-Ruf do not know even the meaning of reform, and since they are salt that has lost its savour how can they save their inferiors from corruption?"

It must be remembered that in the past the monasteries had been centres of blessing to the people, supplying the bodily needs of the indigent and, through external charity, reaching many whose spiritual wants would otherwise have remained undiscovered. Where they fulfilled this mission

[1] Cf. *Letters*, Nos. 205 and 235; *Œuvres*, XII.

their revenues served a good purpose and, by their prayers, their teaching, and their ministry to souls, the monks were able to spread the suggestion of holy living over wide regions. In the diocese of Geneva a monastery that fulfilled the intentions of its founder would have been of incalculable value. Instead there were many, planted in every quarter of Savoy, absorbing money intended for the service of the Church, which was spent in gambling and every form of luxury. From the time of his mission in Thonon until his death François de Sales was constantly embarrassed by the unscrupulous avarice of the Religious Orders. During his years as Bishop his duty required him to maintain the struggle against lawlessness within the cloister; and the question engaged a vast amount of time in consultation and writing. And without any of the sensational combats familiar to readers of monastic history he carried many important points and suppressed flagrant abuses. He did so at infinite cost to himself, and perhaps he did not obtain in any single instance a result that satisfied him. Moreover, the true monastic life held so many opportunities for the prayer and study which were his most desired employments, that his sympathies did not naturally go out to those who regarded it as servitude. Nevertheless his dealings with rebellious monks were marked by understanding as well as compassion. With them, as with wilful men and women in the world, he had intuition for a state of mind alien to his own experience.

It is impossible to do more than touch on the vicissitudes of his endeavour to impose regularity upon the monasteries. The Abbot of Sixt withstood him for fourteen years by means of harassing litigation, and succeeded now and then in ruffling his patience. And then there came a day when the Bishop was summoned to travel with all speed to Sixt,[1] despite inclement weather, because his old antagonist lay dying and could not be at peace without surrender and confession. There at least charity triumphed in the sight of all men.

Reform at Talloires bore on his personal life more closely. His predecessor, Claude Granier, had been a Benedictine monk of Talloires; the abbey itself was within walking

[1] *Œuvres*, XIII. p. 169, *note*.

distance of Annecy and of his old home at La Thuille; and, when the weariness of age and overwork laid hold on him, he dreamed of finding the seclusion that he craved within sound of the bell that called the monks to prayer. From the first his efforts there gave more promise of success because he could watch the effect of every step towards reform. Having received the necessary authority from Rome and Savigny he chose Claude de Quoex, his intimate friend, and established him as Prior. The immediate result of this measure was not encouraging, for the older generation of monks resented this interference and there was open violence. Not only did they defy the authority of the Prior, they went so far as to threaten his life, and it seemed as if the Bishop must use the disciplinary powers reserved for cases of extremity. Even here he brought his law of charity to bear, however. The spirit in which he regarded the delinquents is conveyed in a letter to the Prior, written at a time when the only supporters of reform were to be found among the younger subjects.

"Seeing that those whom God had chosen out are very few," he wrote,[1] "and that they are the least in age and in importance, all that is undertaken must be done humbly and with simplicity, without any appearance of reproof or censure, by word or sign, from this little group towards the others. Their influence must rest rather on good example and behaviour. The beginning being so small, immense forbearance over advance is required, remembering that Our Lord after thirty-three years left us no more than a hundred and twenty disciples really set apart, and of these many were wilful. The palm, queen of all trees, does not bear fruit for a hundred years after planting. There is need then of a generous heart and a long view for so great an enterprise. God has wrought reform from smaller beginnings, and the aim must be for nothing less than perfection." He proceeded to give practical details of the lines on which reform should be inaugurated; and in conclusion struck the note of high endeavour which is latent even in the gentlest of his suggestions. "Here then are my small ideas for a beginning. With the help of God the end may be some-

[1] *Œuvres*, XIV. 538, p. 172.

thing very different for, as you know, *primum in intentione est ultimum in executione*![1] But to do this work to good purpose demands inexhaustible capacity for waiting. I know and regard your Rule which stands for big things, nevertheless it is not wise to go from one extreme to the other without a pause."

The patient efforts of the Bishop and the Prior bore fruit at Talloires, although the life there may never have reached the standard they desired. In fact, the evil of laxity had struck root everywhere, and the scandal of undisciplined religious in Savoy continued throughout the episcopate of S. François and afterwards. He made many conquests from the ranks of unworthy priests and dissolute monks, but he won them individually; neither his plans for reform nor his exhortations to large numbers ever took sensational effect at any special time or place. Probably he did more by the slow process of example than by any measures of discipline, and there were a few who owed their awakening to a force greater than example, to the infection of holiness. If the records that concern his personal life may be believed François de Sales was supremely capable of carrying that infection.

[1] "That which is first as aim is last to be carried out."

CHAPTER XI

The Writer

At a period when multiplicity of choice baffles the readers of devotional literature it is hard to realise the importance of the literary work of François de Sales to his generation. Of those who came to him for counsel and left him with their outlook upon life definitely and permanently altered, a large number were drawn to him by the impression of his books, while his fame as a writer quickened the eagerness of city magnates to secure him for a Lenten course, and thereby widened his opportunity of personal dealing. Gifted originally with rare perception for the mysterious developments of the human soul, he joined with it as the years went on the fruit of deep experience of the interior life in sinners and in saints. It may perhaps be said of him that he had some faint reflection of a gift that his Master used during His ministry on earth, and that "he knew what was in men." Such knowledge, finding expression in his books, acted as a magnet to anxious souls to whom neither the printed nor the spoken word had hitherto given the message that they needed. There are many incidents illustrating the supreme eminence of the place he held in the respect of multitudes who had never had communication with him, and this at a period when journalism was still unknown and enthusiastic admirers had no recognised method of imposing their own conclusions upon others. We see then how assured and how widespread was the fame of his writings. Yet it should be recognised that fame of such a kind may rest on the matter to be conveyed more than on the method of conveying it.

François de Sales the writer does in fact require separate consideration from the saint in any other aspect of his life

Probably his literary tendency—so strong as fairly to be termed his artist nature—provides the true explanation for the friendship with Jean Pierre Camus, Bishop of Belley, which has puzzled some students of his life. Camus was in his twenty-sixth year when, in 1609, Henri IV nominated him to the see of Belley, which shared with that of Geneva the disagreeable distinction of being partly in France and partly in Savoy. François de Sales consecrated the new Bishop, he became his director, and lavished on him such a measure of affection that, besides an annual exchange of visits, he turned to him for relief when bruised in spirit by unexpected sorrow. Thus Camus and Antoine Favre must be ranked together as holding a place apart in his regard. In their intimate association with him the one succeeds the other, for Camus comes upon the scene just before promotion and the duties of his new office removed Favre from the life of Annecy. Camus, like Favre, had won distinction at the University of Paris; he loved books and had ambition as a writer; and undoubtedly the appeal to François de Sales in both cases owed much to the intimate instinct of the man of letters that all three had in common.

In the early days of his episcopate the Bishop of Geneva brushed aside the accusation that he kept horses and hounds, with the comment that such indulgence had no temptation for him. In fact his temptation was of another kind, and it endured with no less persistence because it was not of those which critics, Calvinist or Catholic, would recognise. He loved to deal with words, even to play with them. The tastes which drew him to Camus were those that prompted his eager interest in *l'Académie Florimontaine*. They taught him to find pleasure in association with Honoré d'Ursé,[1] although other ecclesiastics of his school regarded the reading of romances as a definitely corrupting influence, and would not have exempted the writer of "Astrée" from their condemnation of his imitators. It was not solely because he desired to deliver to the world the message with which he felt himself to be entrusted that François de Sales hungered for leisure that he might write. If we regard the expression of that hunger emerging so insistently from the

[1] F. Mugnier, *Hist. d'Antoine Favre*, i. p. 213.

correspondence of his later years, we recognise it as the hunger of the writer.

A letter[1] sent with his "Treatise on the Love of God" to a Jesuit priest in Rome says: "You will see by the Preface that I write little—not assuredly for lack of a subject, for I should very much have liked to write on the love of our neighbour and, in the three or four thousand sermons I have preached in the last twenty-eight years, there is stuff which many people think might have use in the world . . . but it is impossible to write for publication with the weight of my office upon me. If Almighty God wills it He will give me the leisure. If it is not what He intends it must not be my intention either." We see here the effort of will by which his writing becomes secondary. He believed that God had called him to be Bishop of Geneva; he knew that human desire would have made of him a writer, and therefore the lure of the desk must never be obeyed when any of his flock made claim upon him.

It is easier to appreciate the force of the temptation if we consider his actual position as a man of letters. All his public work can be classified under the heading of Religion, and he wrote nothing that did not bear on the particular truth which engaged his thought; nevertheless his method differs materially from that of any other author of the day who wrote for edification. When he stayed in Paris in 1619, if he had any share in social amusements it was as a matter of duty, and he had no leisure to seek recreation at the Hôtel Rambouillet; yet by natural affinity he had his place in the circle of Arthenice.[2] If we consider his style apart from his subject we shall see how readily he can be associated with the movement that set a new standard in the choice of words, and we are reminded that he had been the leading scholar of his year at the University of Padua, and at a later stage chose Latin as the medium for intimate communication with a friend. Thus the humanist was never entirely eclipsed by the theologian and the guide of souls; and his sense of moral depravity in men and women never became so engrossing as to stifle his regret for the degradation of the language. Such a suggestion does not

[1] *Œuvres*, XIX. 1698, p. 321. [2] Weisser, Emmanuel, *L'Hôtel de Rambouillet.*

imply a divided aim: it shows that his call to spiritual service claimed all that he had to give and required the use of all the powers with which he was endowed.

He counted among his readers those who were in the vanguard of the Rambouillet movement, people who were learning to be accurate in speech, who were critical, not with reason only but with eye and ear, before the printed page. They were not great scholars or great critics, nor do we find outstanding genius among their leaders; what they did was done by the strength of numbers moved by a common purpose. The French Academy[1] sprang from the Hôtel Rambouillet, and it is of no little interest that, long before Conrart and Godeau and Chapelain and the rest had formed their plan, François de Sales and Antoine Favre had seen in Annecy the need that eventually was recognised and met in Paris, and organised their own Academy. It may be claimed for François de Sales that he had his part in the work of steadying the language, that the scholar whom Pancirole extolled survived in the ascetic writer and by the cadence of his words made their meaning acceptable to minds that would otherwise have remained closed against it. Much that is now redundant, imagery that seems fantastic, definitions verging on pedantry, unite him the more completely with the spirit of his age. And if we yield to him, reading at length without resistance to his thought, his world projects itself upon us, forcing the standards of to-day to give place to those familiar to Philothée and Théotime and Arthenice, until—when at length we put the printed page aside—the rhythm of the sentences continues with us. Assuredly the artist in him may not be overlooked if we would trace his power to its source, nor can it be forgotten in an attempt to draw nearer to that inner life of which the world knows little.

His first experiment in writing for the public, in 1595, was made because an order from Geneva prohibited the Calvinists from listening to his sermons or holding personal intercourse with him. As he might not reach the ear he had to imagine some device to catch the eye, and so, with much labour, he composed and copied leaflets, to be fixed

[1] Pellisson, *L'Académie Française.*

in places where they could be read by the passer-by, or to be distributed secretly.[1] He produced eighty of these leaflets, each one containing some maxim of the Faith and the refutation of some point of heresy. The task presented many difficulties and very few attractions. As the representative of the Church among a heretic people it was essential that he should not make even a small misstatement, and his reference library consisted of the Bible and the works of Bellarmin.[2] Thus his joy in writing was tempered by continual anxiety and, if the hours when he plied his pen were happy ones, they were so because they gave scope to his capacity for optimism. At other times chill reality forced on him the fact that his sermons never reached the listeners for whom they were intended. When he sat pen in hand he was free to picture every type of reader studying his leaflets. And he was young, and so—though he declared that he provided only the needle and thread to link the arguments of others [3]—the fire of his youth and his passionate conviction glowed from his statements of his faith, while the careful choice of words and the well-balanced sentence proclaim the artist and the scholar. Moreover these unpretentious leaflets departed from established custom, for many of them were designed to win by friendly invitation rather than to denounce and convict error (thereby foreshadowing the method of Bossuet when, nearly a century later, he electrified Christendom with his Exposition and set a new standard in the field of controversy).

It is unlikely that the leaflets accomplished very much, or that they would be remembered if their writer had not become famous [4]; yet they have the very great value that attaches to the preliminary sketches of a master hand. In his case the early sketches are more worthy of his reputation than the earliest specimen of finished work.

It was in 1600 that François de Sales published his first book. His work in the Chablais had ended, and perhaps

[1] See *Année Sainte*, i. p, 147. [2] *Œuvres*, XI. Nos. 44 and 54.
[3] *Ibid.* I. p. 13.
[4] They were published as vol. viii. of his Collected Works by Léonard in 1672.

the fact is responsible for his lack of just that quality which had lent special distinction to his controversial leaflets. These he had written because he might not speak, and the tenderness of his regard for every human soul he strove to touch showed itself in the words set down for the strayed sheep of Thonon. His book, on the other hand, is framed on the familiar lines of the controversial literature of the day. A Calvinist minister—La Faye—had been commissioned by authority in Geneva to denounce the doctrine preached during the Devotion of the Forty Hours at Annemasse and also at the ceremony of erecting the great Cross on the Annemasse and Geneva road in September 1597. The "Brief Treatise" against devotion to the Cross appeared immediately, and François intended to make a prompt reply. Illness prevented this design, and when he returned to his task, eight months later, it was at the bidding of his Bishop. His journey to Rome in November 1598 explains the further delay, and he did not consign the manuscript to the printer until the following autumn.[1] Such conditions are eminently unfavourable to controversial work, and the zeal of the missionary was not sufficient to rise above them. As might be expected from the mind which had martialled the Penitents of the Holy Cross a few years earlier, "The Defence of the Holy Cross" is full of fervour. Unfortunately charity does not always attend on fervour, and François, intent on denouncing an adversary, is as truculent as any other champion of his day. Moreover the book shares yet another of the faults of its kind and is intolerably diffuse. The first edition fell flat. It was announced as a second edition when its author became prominent as Bishop of Geneva, and reappeared, without his sanction, ten years later with a new title. In 1616 he refers to its existence in terms that suggest regret at its survival,[2] and it belongs so completely to the domain of controversy that it can hardly be connected with the work which has given him a place in the world of letters.

In fact François de Sales had none of the equipment of the controversialist; his victories over heresy were victories

[1] The printer was Jean Pillehotte of Lyons.

[2] *Œuvres*, IV. p. 17.

of surprise, and the qualities that made him a converting influence among the Calvinists were simply those that secured for him the persevering obedience of the faithful. Thus, while his efforts in polemics are interesting because of his subsequent eminence as a writer, they are sharply divided from his ascetic writings and are not closely associated with his personal life. His two other books, on the other hand, besides being the expression of his mind at two succeeding stages, are so closely interwoven with the incidents of his career that they must find a place in the most superficial impression of him.

We must look for the first suggestions of the "Introduction to Devout Life" among the new ideas and influences that assailed him during the months in Paris in 1602, and they came from widely divergent sources, for on the one side we know him to have been the chosen confessor of devout souls within and without the cloister, while on the other we find Henri IV expressing a desire that he should give directions on spiritual life to a wider public than could be reached by personal contact. In spite of this the legend that his most celebrated book came into being before he had decided to write one has a certain foundation of truth. The insistence of Mme. de Charmoisy that the letters written for her direction should be read by many others gave the required impetus to a design that awaited leisure, and when the "Introduction to Devout Life" first appeared François de Sales does not seem to have regarded it as a deliberate plunge into authorship. Its immense success revealed to him the power of his pen; and thenceforward he could never still the desire for communication with the minds of others by this means. All that he was had share in that desire, not only the missionary and the guide of souls but the scholar and the artist. Finding that his "Introduction" had innumerable readers, the artist in him required that its form should be brought as near as possible to excellence, and in 1619 there appeared a new edition with some new chapters, and the original text corrected by the author. Comparison with a copy published ten years earlier shows no less than 1037 corrections.[1] This

[1] Vincent, F., *Le Travail du Style chez S. François de Sales.*

punctilious care does more than show the reverence of the artist for his workmanship, it suggests the intensity of the struggle against circumstances required for the writing of the "Treatise on the Love of God." He began this second book when, with the vision of the new Order he was to found, there was dawning on his mind new understanding of the way of prayer; and as he entered on his labour an experience hitherto unknown opened before him. For it is at this stage that, with the discovery of his power, the longing to write took strong possession of S. François. Hitherto, since he attained to priesthood, he had been eager to win souls, giving his preference to the method that promised most success; at this point there are indications of a strong personal desire and, despite the gradual deepening of his prayer that quickened the impulse to self-repression, the desire was so far a part of his holiest experience that it could not be extinguished. Thus it will be seen that the struggle attendant on the writing of the "Treatise" was not only against outward circumstances, there were phases of it that intruded on the hidden field of the interior life and raised mysterious problems. Vincent de Paul says [1] "I had it from the very mouth of the servant of God that he would shed tears in reading over chapters of the books which he had composed, perceiving clearly that what he had written had been infused by God and had not come from his own spirit. This produced in me a certain tender devotion and affection, for I felt that he was divinely illuminated." Nevertheless we shall find the claim of his vocation as Bishop so thwarting the endeavour of the writer that in his last five years he accomplished nothing; and, in the light of this future disappointment, it is interesting to observe the hopes he permitted himself when the acclamations of the devout world hailed his "Introduction."

Suggestions for fresh work accompanied congratulations on his success, and in replying to the Archbishop of Vienne,[2] for whom he had peculiar reverence, he revealed the plans

[1] Testimony of Vincent de Paul, April 17, 1628, in Process of Beatification.

[2] *Œuvres*, XIV. 514, p. 124.

he had been forming for the employment of his pen. He began by repudiating all idea of aspiring to weighty authorship. "Probably no other bishop within a hundred leagues has so overwhelming a multitude of engagements as I have; and here I am out of reach of the books and the advice needed for such a purpose. Moreover great works should be left to master-workmen, for my part I have imagined smaller endeavours more suited to the conditions of one who is not only devoted but is also consecrated to the service of others for the glory of God. I am considering a little book on the Love of God, not in theory but in practice, by adherence to the first Commandment. This will be followed by another showing the application of divine love in the practice of the second Commandment. The two should be reduced to such compass as would go into one volume. I have thought also of giving to the world a little Calendar and almanac for the direction of devout souls, by which I shall show Philothée how every week of the year may have its holy use."

Looking on further still he says he has material for the earliest lessons to beginners in the work of preaching, and that he purposes to use his controversial leaflets written in the Chablais in this connection. Such was his vision of the immediate future.

From the vision we may glance at the reality. More than two years later Mme. de Chantal (who would have applauded a resolve to put personal claims aside for a call which she regarded as a higher one) had pressed him to advance with the "Treatise." "I do all that I can for the book," he answered[1]; "believe me it is no small martyrdom to be unable to get the necessary time." And when he had failed to keep an appointment at the Visitation and the Sisters declared that they rejoiced in the idea that he was writing, he made this comment[2]: "Would to God it were the Treatise that kept me busy every morning, it would then very soon be finished! Instead it is this endless stream of absurd trifles which the world forces on me day by day, making me weary and indignant and wasting all my time. Nevertheless whenever I get a chance of escape

[1] *Œuvres*, XVI. 1050, p. 315. [2] *Ibid.* 948, p. 130.

I persist in adding a line or two." And to a friend at a distance the cry is the same: "I am so overwhelmed by business, or rather by interruptions, that it is all I can do to snatch a quarter of an hour now and then to write on spiritual things." [1]

That is the note of very real suffering. And the brilliancy of his intellect did not exempt him from an experience familiar to the weary writer; he could not retrieve the thought that interruption banished before it was set down; he could only remember its existence and pursue it vainly.[2] The "Treatise" bears the marks of his condition. The defects which make it difficult reading at the present day might not have taken their exaggerated form if he had had a period of unbroken leisure to bring an undistracted mind to bear on its revision. It is less the artist than the thinker that is betrayed by haste, for the abundance of comparisons and similitudes and metaphors were in accordance with the literary tradition of the time, and the wealth of words is characteristic of the writer; it is the thinker in touch with the world he seeks to benefit who has suffered by those broken hours. In preaching it was his rule to keep before him the special truth he desired to impress upon his hearers, but this intention is not evident in some of the chapters of the "Treatise." There are pages where the sequence of the thought is broken, where explanations are explained and analysis is analysed. François de Sales had knowledge and insight and mastery of style, but time, not less essential for the bearing of unblemished fruit, was part of the surrender he had made to the needs of his needy diocese.

He summarised his view of the position of a bishop when his brother Jean-François had been made his coadjutor and was restive at unreasonable interruption. "Monsieur de Chalcédoine," said he, "you are now a bishop and this is the time for you to learn what it is to which that title binds us. We must not be like those little trickles of water that spring from artificial rocks in the gardens of great folk and to which one scarcely dare approach. Such water is drawn only in goblets of silver or of crystal and very little at a time, for fear of disturbing or checking the

[1] *Œuvres*, XVI. 950, p. 137. [2] *Ibid.* 883, p. 20.

flow. To fulfil our office we must be like the great open fountains from which everyone has a right to draw, and from which water is taken in abundance, not only for men but also and more frequently for beasts, everything, even the snakes, having free use of it. . . . We must never repulse anyone even though our peace and comfort may suffer a little." [1]

It was in his special work as a Lent preacher that François de Sales had his fullest opportunity of being at the disposal of all and sundry, like the great open fountain of his imagination. Besides the Lenten preaching that bore abundant fruit within his diocese, at La Roche and at Rumilly and repeatedly in Annecy, there were the two occasions, in 1606 and 1612, when he was summoned to Chambéry by the Senate of Savoy. It should be noticed that for the first fifteen years of his episcopate his Lent at Dijon was the sole occasion when he preached Lent or Advent on French territory. This limitation was not of his own choice. He was invited from many directions, and repeatedly and insistently from Paris ; and as he saw the blessing on his work in other places and realised the ripening of his powers, he confessed to a real desire to give his message once again in Paris churches.[2] He owed his prohibition to the suspicions of the Duke.

The contrast in character between François de Sales and his liege lord Charles Emmanuel of Savoy was borne out by their outward appearance. Tradition shows us the Duke as small, swarthy, and nervous,[3] the Bishop large of build, fair of hair and complexion, deliberate in movement. We see the one devoured by ambition, rapacious of every kind of gain, scheming unceasingly ; the other simple in intention and in deed, making no secret of his purposes, which had no other motive than the quest of souls. Charles Emmanuel had no experience of simplicity, and he had contemplated François de Sales for many years before he became convinced that such a quality had real

[1] *Recueil de la Sœur Rosalie Greffier*, p. 22.

[2] *Œuvres*, XV. 810, p. 272.

[3] Fontenay Mareuil says he was " the most ambitious prince in the world—and the most restless," *Mémoires*, p. 80.

existence. Pending this conviction he used his power to keep the Bishop of Geneva within the limits of Savoy, and had his part in administering the lessons of detachment required for the schooling of a saint.

The usage to which François was subjected by those who held authority carried lessons for others as well as for himself. One instance among many is worth recording. The Lent preaching at Chambéry in 1606 had made an unpromising beginning and the preacher wrote that he seemed to stir his hearers only a very little. The change he desired in the feeling of the people was effected by no deliberate effort of his own and by very unexpected means. The Senate demanded of him that he should use a threat of excommunication to subdue a refractory subject, and, on his refusal, they decreed that his goods should be confiscated until such time as he obeyed. He showed neither resentment nor dismay when he heard of it. He had come to Chambéry to preach, and the offensive message reached him as he was about to mount the pulpit. "Evidently it is a sign that God would have me fixed on heavenly things if earthly possessions are removed," he said, and proceeded with the business of the moment.

Actually the magistrates found it would be unwise to carry out their decree, but the story of their attempt to coerce the Bishop appealed to the popular imagination and became the talk of Chambéry, so that the people thronged the churches where he was to preach. His desire had been to obtain a hearing. When that was accorded he could be confident of some result, and at Chambéry, besides the citizens, the crowd drawn by the common motive of curiosity included many Calvinists. Tradition says that the contrast between the humility and gentleness evident in the Bishop of Geneva and the characteristics assigned to the Catholic Bishop of Calvinist legend broke down the prejudice which was the surest defence against his genius for persuasion, and before Easter these strayed sheep were secure within the fold of the Church.

Cause and effect might not always have such obvious connection, yet the integrity of François de Sales being unassailable, his patience under the suspicions of Charles

Emmanuel deepened the impression made by his personal life on his contemporaries. Many times we find him in his letters of direction urging on his correspondents that the most profitable self-sacrifice is not self-imposed; and it is clear that he must himself have been required to make a surrender of will of the most intimate nature before he could conform to some of his conditions as Bishop of Geneva. The Duke, by galling assertion of authority, did more than fetter liberty of movement, he interfered with the possibility of work for souls. Even at so late a stage as the spring of the year 1617 we find a flagrant example of his methods. Having decreed that every engagement for preaching outside the diocese must be subject to his pleasure, he graciously conceded the services of the Bishop of Geneva in two several directions at the same time. A letter [1] addressed to him by the Bishop at the end of April 1617 presents the situation:

"MONSEIGNEUR,—I have just received the order from Your Highness to prepare myself to preach in Paris next Advent and the Lent following; but also by the letters of M. le Baron de Mercieu I understand Your Highness to have arranged for me with the Parlement of Grenoble for the same Advent and Lent: on this account I humbly beg Your Highness to inform me as to which of these two places I am required to go, the choice being to me a matter of sufficient indifference so long as in either case it accords with Your Highness's good pleasure."

The demand made on a preacher by congregations in Grenoble and in Paris differed materially, yet four months later the Bishop's request for a decision remained unanswered,[2] and it was October before Charles Emmanuel condescended to make his pleasure known.[3] Grenoble had responded to the Bishop's preaching during the previous Advent and Lent, and the favour was accorded to them again, while the hopes aroused in Paris were once more deferred. The patience of a saint did not go unrewarded, however. François de Sales gave himself to Grenoble without protest and with complete goodwill,[4] and at length

[1] *Œuvres*, XVII. 1303, p. 393.
[2] *Ibid.* XVIII. 1344, p. 65.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 422.
[4] *Ibid.* 1366, p. 105.

the Duke awoke to the real nature of the man who had been the target of so much calumny and so many insults. The following year, when the Cardinal Maurice of Savoy was deputed to visit the Court of France to arrange an alliance between Victor Amedée, Prince of Piedmont and heir to the dukedom of Savoy, and Christine, sister of Louis XIII, Charles Emmanuel selected the Bishop of Geneva to accompany him.[1]

Thus once again the gates of Paris opened before François de Sales, admitting him to vast opportunities of spiritual service.

[1] *Œuvres*, XVIII. 1384, p. 138.

CHAPTER XII

The Bishop in Paris

François de Sales left Annecy in the middle of October 1618 to join the Cardinal Maurice of Savoy, and journeying with him by way of Lyons and Orleans reached Paris the second week in November. He had said beforehand [1] that his time would not be at his own disposal, as he was in attendance on the Prince, and throughout their stay he lodged under the same roof with him, as the guest of the King, at the Hôtel d'Ancre. Nevertheless, when the first excitement of their reception had subsided, the duties required of the Bishop were not so onerous as to prevent him from using the months in Paris as though the chief object of the embassy had been to offer an opportunity of work for souls.

He said he had few desires, and when he had one did not desire it very much. Perhaps he permitted himself a reservation in the matter of a return to Paris, for it is evident that his effort for detachment had never stilled that craving. All through his years as Bishop invitations to preach in Paris had been coming, and his petition for leave to accept had always been rejected. Seven years before the prohibition was removed he had explained to Mme. Acarie [2] that his desire sprang from his own necessity, not from the hope of doing good to others. He longed for the familiar intercourse of that circle of rare spirits with whom he had been permitted to associate at an earlier time, and such a longing may not have ranked in his mind as a desire; he saw it as a need for preserving the right spirit of his vocation. When at length he found himself in Paris the Hôtel Acarie remained only as a memory; its mistress had died as a religious in

[1] *Œuvres*, XVIII. 1483, p. 303. [2] *Ibid.* XV. 746, p. 156.

the Carmel at Pontoise a few months earlier, and the movement which had stirred him so profoundly had entered upon a different phase. In 1602 Paris had much to bestow on the young ecclesiastic from Savoy, and he received more than he could give. If his humility taught him to look for a repetition of that experience after sixteen years his second visit must have left him unsatisfied. Indeed the similitude he had coined of the public fountain, from which all might draw at will, applied to his position among these people who had awaited his coming for so long, and, however warm the welcome and wide the opportunity offered him, the overwhelming pressure of this unfamiliar life prompted regret for Annecy and his own flock, before he had been many weeks in Paris.

Tradition says that the Bishop of Geneva played an important part in the mission to the Court of France, and that the desired alliance would never have been conceded to Savoy without his influence over the young King. The only evidence in support of this idea afforded by his letters is his tribute to the charm and virtue of the princess, and a reference to the friendliness and piety of Louis XIII.[1] He could not give his impressions in writing, and his method of dealing with the world around him had been, at all times, to accept without protest the conditions that he found and then to use the opportunities they afforded him. There was much to amaze and to repel in the conditions he found at Court. The King, recently married to Anne of Austria, was in his nineteenth year. He had rebelled against the tyranny of his mother only to fall under the dominion of his favourite, Charles d'Albert de Luynes. In November 1618, when François de Sales began to be a familiar figure at the Louvre and at Saint-Germain, Marie de' Medici was in banishment at Blois, and Armand Jean du Plessis, Bishop of Luçon and scion of the House of Richelieu, had received command to remain at Avignon and there await further intimation of the King's pleasure.

One comment on the Court and on professional courtiers did escape from the pen of François de Sales. "They are like a swarm of wasps crowding on carrion," he wrote.[2]

[1] *Œuvres*, XVIII. 1484, p. 309. [2] *Ibid.* XIX. 1553, p. 22.

Letters written at the beginning and at the end of his experience amplify that verdict. "Do not think favour could ensnare me," he wrote in December [1]; "here I am in the novitiate of the Court, but never, God helping me, will I be professed. On Christmas Eve I preached before the Queen at the Capuchin Church, where she made her Communion, but I can assure you that I did not preach either better or more willingly before these princes and princesses than I do in our poor little Visitation at Nessi." And when the great world was displayed in its most dazzling aspect at Tours in October, the year following, "It is a great loss of time to be at Court," he wrote,[2] "and for many it will mean losing eternity also."

The intricate politics of the hour did not affect S. François save in the practical question of the duration of his absence from his diocese, and, among those connected with the Court, there were one or two, bound to him by ties of closest friendship, who must have welcomed him with keener pleasure because he stood aloof from plots, and was simply a loyal subject of Savoy. During the years that Paris was forbidden ground he maintained correspondence with Antoine des Hayes, to whom he refers as "the perfect friend." [3] M. des Hayes held office in the Royal Household, and his position not only qualified him as a guide to a guest at Court but made him invaluable as a supporter when the Visitation sought to strike root in Paris. Friendship has a very real part in the life of S. François, and here and there we are reminded of the faithfulness that he inspired in those who loved him. M. des Hayes, despite years of separation and all the distractions of the Court,[4] could not have been more eager to further the smallest plans of the Bishop of Geneva if he had been one of the intimate circle gathered around him in Savoy.

Pierre de Bérulle must be reckoned with Des Hayes as one of the friends awaiting François de Sales at the Court of Louis XIII and as representing one of the great attractions of the mission to Paris. There are many testimonies to his admiration for Bérulle in the letters of S. François; the

[1] *Œuvres*, XVIII. 1492, p. 320.
[2] *Ibid.* XIX. 1560, p. 42.
[3] *Ibid.* 1560, p. 39.
[4] *Ibid.* XII. p. 251, *note.*

two had laboured together in the cause of the French Carmel many years earlier, and had shared in the aspirations and the plans that took form with the foundation of the French Oratory. The first enterprise had close connection with the second, for the ignorance and indifference of the priesthood had gone too far to be checked by human effort, and those who planned attack relied on the work of the contemplative to aid them. After reiterated appeals to François de Sales to be the Founder of the new Congregation, Bérulle had begun life in Community with five friends in a house near the Great Carmel. That was in November 1611. When Cardinal Maurice of Savoy journeyed to Paris in 1618 the French Oratorians were firmly established ; they were approved by Rome and encouraged by the Court, and had fixed themselves in the rue Saint Honoré, at a spot near the Louvre, and so much in the centre of the city that their existence could not be overlooked.[1] They desired to be prominent in the eyes of all men because the reason of their being was the sanctification of the priesthood, a need so great as to cry for recognition.

We have seen that François had near knowledge of those weaknesses among the shepherds that held such peril for the sheep ; he had followed the work of Bérulle with eager interest from a distance, and became closely associated with it as soon as he had opportunity. And, as before when he touched the work of Mme. Acarie, a common interest brought him fellowship with some who were not directly connected with the work in hand. Among his penitents Bérulle numbered Vincent de Paul, tutor and chaplain in the household of M. de Gondi, General of the Galleys ; and Vincent de Paul refers to " the familiar conversations which I enjoyed with the Bishop of Geneva," and (for once allowing himself to depart from his ordinary reserve) declares that " not only were his words so many fiery torches to inflame souls, but his every action was a sermon." [2]

S. François needed no preliminaries to intimacy when he saw his own aspirations reflected in another soul. Vincent

[1] See Houssaye, M., *Le Père de Bérulle et l'Oratoire de Jésus.*

[2] Testimony in Process of Beatification.

de Paul found himself admitted to familiar conversation instantly, and the same confidence and friendship was extended at a first encounter to another of the little group who seemed to have been awaiting the hour of his coming. On April 5, 1619, at the request of an official of the French Court, the Bishop of Geneva went to the Convent of Maubuisson for a confirmation. Angélique Arnauld, the young Abbess of Port Royal, was in authority there, and her record of the impression he made upon her is an echo of the tribute of Vincent de Paul. "God was truly and evidently in him," she says, "and although I had knowledge of all those most highly esteemed among devout persons I had never found in any of them what I found in him." [1]

Pride was the besetting sin of Angélique Arnauld. We know it by her own acknowledgment and by much other evidence. And we find this passage in a letter written to her by François de Sales soon after their first meeting.[2] He has just assured her that he is ready to give her the fullest spiritual help within his power:

"Have no misgivings that I suspect you of desiring this because I am well known, for, although I am quite capable of thoughts as worthless, they do not assail me in connection with questions of this kind; on the contrary there is nothing perhaps so calculated to help me towards humility, being astounded that so many servants of Our Lord should have confidence in such an imperfect being. It disposes me to make great resolves to try and become what they believe me to be." And a month later he touches the same note again,[3] showing how truly it expresses the habit of his mind. He refers to their mutual confidence, and says he is sure that God has prompted it—"and further I perceive that it is useful to me and inspires me to do better."

We shall see that, in the eyes of the world, this was the period of his greatest eminence, and Angélique Arnauld, for all her force of character, was a nun of twenty-five, without much learning or much experience and not known as yet beyond a narrow circle. In his care for her, in his

[1] Clemencet, *Hist. de Port Royal*, i. 85 (Part I. livre iii.).
[2] *Œuvres*, XVIII. 1519, p. 378. [3] *Ibid.* 1524, p. 388.

ready friendship, and in such simple revelations of his mind, there was material from which she might have fashioned a shield against the onslaught of her most dangerous temptation. Perhaps she knew it was so, for, many years after his death, she said that when she prayed most earnestly, and particularly at Mass, she felt his presence as at one with her guardian angel.[1]

It was well that S. François had achieved spiritual maturity, for the reverence accorded to him reached the point of adulation. For a time he may, in a sense, have been swept along with the wave, knowing that the experience was only passing and opportunities must be taken as they came. When Mme. de Chantal remonstrated at his excessive energy he said that he "had never had less leisure and never felt stronger or more capable." [2] That light-hearted response was given in March, and if the embassy had not been prolonged far beyond his anticipations he might have weathered the violence of his friends in Paris without permanent injury. Unfortunately intricate negotiations delayed the return to Savoy; and S. François, having committed himself to a system of unmeasured giving, had overdrawn his balance of vitality while the demands on it increased. His state was grave enough to inspire acute anxiety at the Visitation; and Angélique Arnauld recorded that he was ill for nine days at Maubuisson in August, and during that time never ceased his work for souls.[3]

We must regard him, in these months, as one who knew himself to be entrusted with a message for unknown listeners even more than for the little group who had looked forward to his coming. He told Vincent de Paul[4] at this time "that he knew when someone was interiorly touched while he was preaching, because something went out of him which did not come from his own movement and which he had not meditated, in a way that he could not understand and by a divine impulse. He was certain of it because souls came to him afterwards and declared to him the words which had touched them." Doubtless each one of those who felt his thought directed to themselves, as he describes,

[1] Clemencet, *op. cit.* p. 271.
[2] *Œuvres*, XVIII. 1510, p. 364.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 409, *note.*
[4] Testimony, *op. cit.*

assumed that he had come to Paris just at that moment for their individual relief. He had held self-consideration in abeyance for so long, and so constantly had merged all personal interests in the griefs and difficulties of others, that he could not fail to show his knowledge of the life familiar to his auditors. He talked from the pulpit, handling ordinary sins and sorrows, yet so exposing them that they assumed another aspect, and fresh possibilities dawned on jaded minds. It is easy to understand—having attempted to follow him through his own processes of growth—that he could see the world more clearly than those who were involved in it, and, though the clearness of his vision was disconcerting, there were few who heard him without desiring to stand beside him and to learn to see as he did—if only for a moment.

During his ten months in Paris he preached 365 times,[1] never refusing a petition if by any means he could arrange to fulfil it, for he regarded his enforced absence from his diocese, and his consequent freedom from the perpetual claims of his flock, as imposing on him an obligation to seize every opportunity of service that presented itself. And the result of preaching, in Paris as it had been elsewhere, was a succession of demands from individual hearers. We are told that his friends were wont to remonstrate with him because he expended so much time on "the small troubles of small people." To which on one occasion he replied: "Truly God knows that I do not want more important work. I am indifferent as to what I do so long as it is in His service. While I am doing these little things I am not required to do anything else. Is one not employed to sufficient advantage in doing the Will of God?"[2] And when it was urged that those who had serious matters on which to consult him were crowded out by the importunities of small people, he had his answer ready: "These small people whom you call unimportant want to be heard and helped over their affairs as much as do the prominent folk in theirs. If one soul is as much troubled for insignificant cause as another might be for some great matter, is that a reason for not offering comfort to the first and sending her

[1] *Œuvres*, XVIII. p. 342. [2] Camus, *op. cit.* vol. iii. p. 308.

away content? The small affairs of humble people are just as important to them as are great matters to the great. Are we not pledged to all? They come seeking consolation; are we not bound to give it to them?" [1]

And so we find, among the penitents with whom he maintained correspondence after he returned to Annecy, the wife of a glovemaker on the Pont aux Oiseaux [2]; and there is abundant evidence that he did not discriminate, on the spiritual more than on the worldly side, among those who sought his help, finding material in the stupid and despondent as well as in potential saints and hardened sinners. Even while he acknowledged that he was compelled to undertake more than he could hope to accomplish,[3] he clung to the principle of assuming high capacity in every soul that showed good desire. With the turning of the will towards God the highest that had once been possible became possible again; and no previous record of failure checked his confidence in eventual achievement. "God hides the secrets of the future from man, and if we decide to give no assistance except to the souls that are certain to persevere we shall find it extremely difficult to settle which is which. If we can keep our neighbour from sin, even if it be only for an hour, we must do it." [4] Those words give the key to the method of S. François in spiritual dealing, and, by his own confession, he was never more notably the spendthrift with time and vigour than during the months in Paris. When at length he escaped from the claims that multiplied so continually it was with broken health.

In September the reconciliation between Louis XIII and the Queen-Mother took the Court to Tours, and from thence Christine of France, now Princess of Piedmont, made a state progress by way of Amboise, Bourges, Moulins and Grenoble, and so to Chambéry. François de Sales had his part in every ceremony, and his letters show alternations of mood; sometimes he rebels against the clamour, sometimes the human interest of events touches his imagination. A letter to Ste. Chantal shows that the days at Tours were

[1] *Œuvres de Ste. Chantal*, iii. p. 129.
[2] *Œuvres*, XX. 1831, p. 150.
[3] *Ibid.* XVIII. 1502, p. 343.
[4] *Ibid.* XVI. 884, p. 22.

memorable. He says[1]: "I saw the Queen-mother and did reverence on arrival and on departure; and she paid me compliments. . . . I learnt to know a great many Bishops and especially the Bishop of Luçon,[2] who pledged himself to friendship and promised that he would come into line with me and have no aim save God and the salvation of souls. I saw Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld who was very friendly and said he would take special care of my Daughters. I tell you all this in case the Queen-mother should go to stay in Paris, that you may, if occasion offers, use the interest of M. de Luçon, as he loves me, and may look for that of M. le Cardinal also.

"Lastly I saw M. le Cardinal de Retz, who began by inviting me to stay in France on terms which if properly fulfilled would tempt me more than any others that could be suggested."

This is the first mention of the project that he should be coadjutor and eventually Bishop of Paris, which disturbed the friends of the Bishop of Geneva during the months that ensued. To the Bishop himself it was not a matter of very deep concern. For a moment he saw it as offering vast opportunity for the work he had most at heart, but that first impulse of welcome did not mature. As the months passed on disinclination became more definite: "I am more the poor priest than I have ever been," he wrote[3] when he had settled back into his life at Annecy; and, going back to his old protest that he was wedded to his diocese, he said if he obtained a divorce it would not be with the intention of marrying again, and certainly not of sharing the wife of someone else.[4] And so Mme. de Chantal, watching in tremulous anxiety and striving to be absolutely faithful in her reports[5] on the fluctuations of opinion over the appointment, could rest content that, on her return to Annecy, the guidance which she esteemed the highest privilege life could bestow would be restored to her.

So long as François de Sales remained in Paris he was

[1] *Œuvres*, XIX. 1560, p. 37.
[2] Armand Jean du Plessis, afterwards Cardinal Richelieu.
[3] *Œuvres*, XIX. 1606, p. 131.
[4] *Ibid.* 1618, p. 152.
[5] *Œuvres de Ste. Chantal*, iv. p. 380

the object of enthusiastic admiration. All sorts of people offered him service and showered compliments upon him, and it was by personal influence that he prevailed against the vigorous opposition to the foundation of a House of the Visitation in Paris. His humility remained undisturbed by all such tests, however, and, having passed through them, he was required to face an ordeal of a very different nature and prove the reality of that interior detachment which he preached to others. The curious episode which gave him this opportunity may be recorded briefly.

Among the innumerable kinsfolk of S. François in Savoy was the family of Bernard de Foras. A young man bearing this name who held office in the household of the Duke of Nemours became a suitor for the hand of Françoise de Chantal. After prolonged uncertainty the young lady, desiring greater worldly advantage than he could offer, declined to accept her mother's arrangement; and a little later Bernard de Foras married Anne Le Beau, a young and wealthy widow. The correspondence of François de Sales contains many references to matrimonial alliances, generally of the sons and daughters of his friends. He regarded such arrangements benevolently; experience taught him that they involved considerable sacrifice on the part of the wife. "No doubt it is a great support to have a good husband," he wrote to one who hesitated, "but they are few, and even the good ones are more apt with domination than with support." [1]

From this it may be deduced that, while he did so much to bring the devout life within reach of married people, François de Sales did not give serious attention to match-making; and when Guillaume de Bernard de Foras and Anne Le Beau came to consult him in Paris on the question of betrothal, he gave them his encouragement and his blessing without very careful investigation of the surrounding circumstances. He followed the Court to Tours a week or two later, and the wedding took place soon after his departure. When he had returned to Annecy a letter from Mme. de Chantal described the sequel.

M. de Montholon, uncle of the bride, objected to the

[1] *Œuvres*, XIV. 524, p. 151.

marriage. He had such close connection with Church life in Paris that the Advent course at S. André des Arts had been preached by the Bishop of Geneva at his invitation.[1] He found that the bridegroom, being a native of Savoy, had no strong support in Paris save from his intimacy with the Bishop of Geneva, and that he alleged the approval of the Bishop to justify his actions. M. de Montholon saw that he could not work his will with the culprit while such protection remained to him. He became blinded by passion and, as the great reputation of François de Sales stood in his way, he struck at that reputation. A rumour, insidiously propagated, spread about the city that Guillaume de Bernard de Foras was the son of the much-applauded preacher from Savoy, and that a conspiracy for this wealthy marriage had been devised before they set foot upon French soil.

This was the story conveyed to François de Sales by a succession of letters from Mme. de Chantal. He had plunged deeply into the life of Annecy and of the diocese, beginning an Advent course for which the Cathedral was thronged, renewing his personal hold on the Visitation Sisters at the Mother-House, entering once again into the intimate joys and sorrows of those about him; and he responded very reluctantly to the demand that he should take any measures for self-defence.[2] "I say that for my part it is best to follow the teaching of S. Paul, 'Avenge not yourselves, dearly beloved, but rather give place unto wrath,'—nevertheless as you think it is desirable I will write to M. Berger that he may have authority to refute the calumny. . . . Be at peace over all this, my very dear Mother! The amount of reputation I shall need to carry out the work destined for me must be known to the Almighty, and I desire neither more nor less than it pleases Him that I should have."

The distance between Annecy and Paris and the immense time required for the transit of letters, added to the difficulty of dealing with a tangle that had no parallel in his experience. A fortnight passed before he took any further action, and then a packet[3] addressed to Mme. de Chantal

[1] *Œuvres*, XVIII. 1483, p. 303. [2] *Ibid.* XIX. 1569, p. 58.
[3] *Ibid.* 1575, p. 65.

enclosed an unsealed letter for M. de Montholon which she and M. des Hayes were to read, and to despatch if that course seemed to them advisable. "In truth I am distressed and amazed," says the letter, "being unaware of having given any provocation; for, except by bearing witness once to the merit and good qualities of the gentleman, and on another occasion to his religion, I have done nothing to further this alliance, except perhaps in recommending it to God if it might be for His Glory, and anything more than this that may be said is exaggeration."

Mme. de Chantal made no secret of the violence of her resentment, and doubtless she expressed her sense of the inadequacy of this protest to the arch-offender. S. François had a word for her: "You must not be so sensitive for me," he wrote; "you must be quite willing that I should be blamed: if I do not deserve it in one direction I do in another. . . . My Mother, you are too much concerned for that which touches me, and then—why should I, alone of all the world, be exempt from abuse? I can assure you that nothing in this business has troubled me so much as to see that you are troubled by it. Be at peace and the God of peace will be with you, nothing will disturb our peace if we are His servants. My dear Mother, there is a great deal of self-love in the desire that all the world should love us and every thing be to our credit."

The letters between Annecy and the Visitation in Paris at this period reveal how far one of these fellow-travellers had journeyed beyond the other on the road where once they had moved side by side. When the storm died down and Bernard de Foras emerged from prison François de Sales made no sign of relief or thankfulness. He had not the smallest misgiving as to his own conduct in relation to the young couple, and with complete simplicity he practised his own teaching on indifference.[1] And probably the tranquillity that was so entirely in keeping with the saintly character that Paris had acclaimed was the surest refutation of any charge brought against it. The public mind, always hungry for sensation, seized on the libel and found momentary pleasure in it, but the people had seen their guest too often

[1] *Œuvres*, XIX. 1580, p. 80; 1602, p. 121.

and too closely to be deceived for long, and François de Sales was restored to a place in their hearts beyond the reach of malice and detraction.

His labour in Paris proved very fruitful, and the cost was in proportion to the result, for he never threw off the fatigue ensuing from it. Moreover, his part in the embassy to the French Court was responsible for his appointment as almoner to the young Princess of Piedmont, and the prospect of many journeys and periodical attendance upon royalty had to be faced. He made this new burden his excuse for an appeal that his brother should be appointed coadjutor to the bishopric of Geneva; and a scheme for withdrawing from all official duties began to take definite form in his mind. There were many circumstances calculated to foster it. In May 1620 there came an order from the Duke that he should go on a diplomatic mission to Rome. "Actually the journey may serve good purpose for the Church, although in sober truth it has not the smallest attraction for me," he wrote to Mme. de Chantal;[1] "in fact I must always be going when I would like to stay, I must be for ever at Court when I like simplicity."

The journey did not take place, but other propositions for using his skill in difficult negotiation kept him in continual uncertainty. Life had so shaped itself that he had learnt to suppress the impulse of choice in the employment of his gifts. He had made surrender of his will with real and deliberate intention, and it would seem that his offer was accepted. Wishes—even longings—remained to him. He wanted stillness, solitude, a time for thought. He planned that his brother should succeed him, and he chose the place of his own retirement on the hill above the Monastery of Talloires, looking out over the changing beauties of the lake. The dream was one to which he could turn for solace when the burden of actual events pressed hardly on him. And so it has its place in the record of his life, although it was destined to remain a dream.

[1] *Œuvres*, XIX 1645, p. 194.

CHAPTER XIII

The Passing of a Saint

The history of the last weeks in the life of François de Sales has been recorded with a wealth of detail. It seems that those about him saw him in a light that is not of this world, although they did not pause to state, or to examine, their impression. The last year was not marked by great events; even the anxieties and uncertainties that made the early months of 1622 so hard to bear were not, in any single instance, of real importance. Then and later he had need of unbroken rest, and every hour of every day spent at Annecy was overcrowded, while the orders that summoned him elsewhere implied even heavier tax upon his powers.

In the summer the Pope required him to preside over a Chapter of the Feuillant Order at Pignerol; and he set forth for the difficult journey across the mountains. From Pignerol he proceeded to Turin, where the Duke of Savoy desired his presence. Christine of France, Princess of Piedmont, had arranged comfortable quarters for her Almoner, and was astonished to find that he chose to share the unfinished abode of the Feuillant Fathers. The Court ecclesiastics of whom she had experience would not have coveted a narrow and ill-ventilated cell as a refuge from the pomps and luxuries which surrounded their period of office, and his protest that he hated courts and loved simplicity can never have reached her ears. Nor can it be said that the result justified his departure from custom, for the illness that had long been threatening overtook him, and he was kept a prisoner at Turin when affairs at Annecy were in urgent need of him. Probably his choice of hardship hastened his illness; yet to have chosen otherwise would have been to change his course, for his feet had long

been set upon a way of hardness. He said he felt it to be a grave matter for regret that he had never known the meaning of poverty,[1] and, as life went on, he sought privations which his lot did not impose upon him. Perhaps his end was hastened, yet those who loved him best would hardly have exchanged the memory of his folly for a vision of him in the environment of ease and leisure his bodily state demanded. As they watched him through the distresses of the final months they could not fail to recognise the astounding swiftness of his progress up the path that leads towards perfection.

Illness held him at Turin till the middle of August, a full month longer than he had intended, and anxious hearts awaited him at home, knowing that a certain valiant effort to achieve reality in religious life could not prosper without his help and sanction. The nuns of S. Catherine, in their stately seclusion near to Annecy, had listened year after year to his exhortations without giving practical effect to the desire for reform with which his words inspired them —until, at length, certain among them, despairing of any drastic change, decided to leave the ease and dignity of the Mother House and seek a way of religion that conformed more closely to their vows, under another roof. Action taken during the Bishop's absence involved him in difficulty, and his hands were full of many affairs; yet the intention had his sympathy, and the Sisters who insisted on reform entered on their new life at Rumilly with the assurance of his blessing, and built up the faithful practice of the future on the teaching they had drawn from him. As the Bernardines of Savoy they have their place in the religious history of their time; and their movement for reform was no less clearly the reflection of those pure standards which the Founder of the Visitation had displayed to them, because it was made at the eleventh hour, and could not be guided by the human voice that had been the channel of its inspiration.

When at length he did find strength for the homeward journey, he had no rest from the complicated business, public and private, confided to his charge. His letters

[1] Hauteville, *op. cit.* i. p. 203.

tell their own tale. "I need not tell you that I have my share in all your joys and all your sorrows," [1] is typical of his response to the call of private interest; and where he touched on the business of the Church his zeal had not slackened since those long past days when he fought the battles of his converts in the Chablais.

The initiation of his brother and coadjutor into the duties of their office occupied much time and thought; and his Daughters of the Visitation, so long deprived of their Mother-Foundress, had their own special claim. The Oratorians as well as the Bernardines were to be established at Rumilly; and there were claims of Barnabite Friars to be supported with the Duke of Savoy against certain Benedictines of Cluny. Moreover there was grievous oppression of the people of his diocese by troops quartered upon them, in readiness for possible war upon the frontier, and on their behalf he felt constrained to use his interest in high places. And, besides these definite commitments, from far and near cries of appeal rang in his ears continually, and from all directions supplicating hands stretched out towards him. All that he had to give—his prayers, his money, interest, wise advice—he gave unceasingly, the giving of himself had never been more lavish and unmeasured than during these last months. In the midst of it all there were times when he knew he had reached the limit of his strength; and the farewells before he joined the ducal cortège in Provence had the solemnity of grave foreboding, for many of his intimate friends shared his belief that he would never return to Annecy. His warning to a confidential servant bears witness to his own composure in face of the event. "I shall not go like a troop of Light Horse," he told him; "there will be no bugle calls, and when you hear the news that I am ill, you may be certain that I am dead." [2]

This sense of the near approach of death was not continuous, however, for he could write on the eve of departure that he hoped soon to be home again. It was on his people, rather than on himself, that premonition cast so dark a shadow; and when for the last time he mounted his horse

[1] *Œuvres*, XX. 1946, p. 372. [2] Sales, *op. cit.* ii. 238.

in the courtyard of the Hôtel Favre, and rode forth for Seyssel, where he was to take boat for Lyons, his escort—composed of many friends and kinsmen besides the officials of the cathedral city—seem to have been unmeasured in demonstration of their grief. The time to embark came as a relief, though the conditions were not propitious; a bitter wind raged and the river had a coating of ice. When they were afloat one of his suite spoke to him of the lamentations of his flock, but he put that subject aside. "It would be better to talk of the beautiful places to which we are going," he said.[1]

During those last months he met with strange affronts, considering his rank and dignity. On his journey from Turin an innkeeper had treated him insolently and aroused the violent anger of his chaplains.[2] When he halted at Lyons, on his further journey, the master of the vessel that was to convey him to Avignon refused permission to come aboard without a passport, and, though time was precious and exposure dangerous to his health, he had to wait on the quay while members of his suite were despatched to procure the required documents. On both occasions he remained entirely friendly in his demeanour towards the offender, and between Lyons and Avignon he attempted to make a convert of the churlish commander of his transport.[3]

The neglect and discomfort of the early stage of his journey troubled him less than the reception awaiting him at Bourges and afterwards at Avignon. In these places—so runs the chronicle—he was regarded not as a mortal man, but as a saint from heaven, and the excitement roused by the state entry of the young King Louis XIII did not distract the fervour of the populace. At Avignon he had joined the suite of the Prince Cardinal Maurice of Savoy, and his further movements were governed by those of the two Courts. The progress from Avignon to Lyons was slow, and at halting places he found opportunity to practise the self-abnegation in small things by which he reconciled himself to the atmosphere of a Court; and when at length the journey ended, he refused the hospitality that great

[1] *Année Sainte*, xi. 269.
[2] Sales, *op. cit.* ii. 235.
[3] *Année Sainte*, xi. 333.

personages pressed upon him and took up his abode in the gardener's cottage of the Visitation Convent,[1] where ordinarily the Confessor of the Community lodged. He reached Lyons the twenty-ninth day of November.

One month of work on earth remained to him, and he entered on it with mind and body strained to breaking point. Nevertheless, the days and hours had never been more crowded. He was a Court official with many duties to perform in that capacity; he was the Founder of the Visitation, in temporary contact with a very important House of the Order; and he was the celebrated Bishop of Geneva, known to so many who as yet had not beheld him for his genius as a preacher, as a writer, and most of all as a director. Thus he found himself at the mercy of all sorts and conditions of persons; and the history of the Bellecour Convent describes the long procession of those who desired speech with him. Courtiers and great ecclesiastics mingled with humbler folk in claiming his attention; and in the city churches he preached and heard confessions whenever other duties left him time for the service that was peculiarly his own.

It is worth while, if only for the sake of contrast, to turn from the Visitation Church and the gardener's cottage to another scene enacted in Lyons during that month of December 1622. All those who stood for the great world in France and in Savoy, and the Bishop of Geneva among them, assembled in the Chapel of the Archiepiscopal Palace on December 12, to see Armand Jean du Plessis, Bishop of Luçon, receive the Cardinal's Hat from the hands of Louis XIII.[2] This was a sight worth seeing to all who were present by reason of its surrounding stateliness, while to those who regarded it with knowledge it was full of portents. François de Sales, who had clearer vision for the central figure than was possible to others, mourned for the vanished promise of a very different future, and looked forward with apprehension to the career of triumph then at its dawn. The three years since their last meeting had severed the bonds of sympathy that for a while united these two, and the values set by each on the things of earth and of heaven

[1] *Année Sainte*, xi. 775.

[2] See Hanotaux, *Vie de Richelieu*.

differed materially. This great dignity, just achieved by Richelieu, and for which he had schemed for years, had lain within reach of S. François. Whispers that he was to be a Cardinal had been rife at Court,[1] and so deep was the veneration felt for him by great persons in high places that he remained without visible honours only because he did not wish for them. The time had passed when such elevation would strengthen his hands for the service of the Church; and the strong desire he had learnt from the passing years and the divers experiences they had brought him was to be "more the poor priest than I have ever been." And so, if the ceremony in the Archiepiscopal Palace inspired misgivings for Richelieu and his future, S. François must have found in it suggestions for thanksgiving on his own behalf. More and more he was conscious of the gulf that divided him from the world, in which, ostensibly, he held a place of honour. On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, when all Lyons was intent on a royal progress through the streets, he took refuge in the parlour of the Visitation, rejoicing at escape to a haven where a festival could have true recognition.

By his arrangement Mme. de Chantal had come to Lyons during his stay there. Two years had passed since their last meeting, yet he could not give her the opportunity of quiet intercourse that she desired, and he bade her wait for that until they met at Annecy. Meanwhile, she was to visit certain new Foundations and, after the Christmas festival, they would both turn their faces homewards. With that they parted, for the last time. The Mother-Foundress spent Christmas at Grenoble and was there when S. François died.

During those crowded December days the sense of approaching death that had been so vivid when he left Annecy seems to have receded; the testimonies of those in contact with him at Lyons make no reference to it. There is, indeed, one instance when he made a definite plan for the future which was memorable on account of its connection with a well-known name, that of Jean-Jacques Olier, the future curé of Saint-Sulpice.[2] M. Jacques Olier had been for

[1] *Œuvres*, XX. p. 337, *note*. [2] Faillon, *Vie de M. Olier*, i. 11.

five years Royal Intendant in Lyons. He lived in a fine house in the Place Bellecour, and had greatly desired to be the host of the Bishop of Geneva. Having failed to achieve that honour, he and his family made the most of the opportunities of intercourse given by their near neighbourhood to the Visitation Convent. He had three sons, the second of whom, Jean-Jacques, although destined for the priesthood, was regarded by his mother as incorrigibly wilful, and treated by her with extreme severity. It is even possible that she desired her own continual rebukes should gain support from high authority, for when she brought her family to S. François to ask his blessing, she complained of her black sheep as likely to dishonour the calling chosen for him. The Bishop, who consistently opposed a forced vocation, observed Jean-Jacques with attention, and eventually gave judgment in these words: "Hé, Madame, have just a little patience and do not be distressed, for God is preparing this child to be one of the great servants of His Church." And he suggested that, when he returned to Savoy, the boy should be entrusted to him for training.

The considerate kindness of François de Sales towards Jean-Jacques Olier denotes his view of charity. Where he had direct concern with individuals, neither the insignificance of the need nor the unworthiness of the applicant checked his desire to understand and help. In the record of the very last days, when the touch of death was upon him and human interests were growing dim, he did not lapse from this habit of mind. In the midst of important discussion with an important person he could observe a child's approach and stoop that she might kiss the crucifix he wore. On Christmas Eve demands beyond all power of fulfilment crowded upon him, yet he had thought for the gardener's daughter, and arranged her escort through the dark streets to the Midnight Mass. He had many occasions for charity, for the anxiety that his physical condition inspired in those around him manifested itself in eager competition to exploit such vestige of capacity for kindly service as still remained to him. On Christmas Eve Marie de' Medici, the Queen-Mother, required him to lay the foundation-stone of a new monastery in a distant quarter. The ceremony lasted three

hours, and during that time he remained bareheaded in spite of intense cold.[1] At midnight he said Mass and preached in the Chapel of the Visitation. At dawn he went to the Church of the Dominicans to hear the confessions of the Prince and Princess of Piedmont, to say his second Mass, and give them Communion. Returning to the Visitation for his third Mass of Christmas, he found the Convent Chaplain about to approach the Altar and insisted on giving place to him. Thus he remained fasting until noon approached. Later in the day he presided at the Clothing of two Visitation Novices and preached, and, as it was the eve of the departure of the Queen-Mother, he went to her palace for farewells of ceremony, being detained there until late at night.

S. Stephen's Day gave him a little respite. He dined with a Canon of S. Nizier and remained for a discussion of business in which he was concerned. Five o'clock found him at the Visitation Convent, and in the two hours that followed he gave the last Conference of the series that had begun when the first little group of Sisters assembled at the Maison de la Galerie. For two hours the convent walls shut out the clamour of the great foreign city and he was once again at ease in the midst of his own family.

He talked to them of the holy indifference of Jesus, at Bethlehem as on Calvary, and showed them the possibilities of their own lives in the light of that example. And he gave them opportunity to speak, for this was the end of his stay at Lyons and he had come to say good-bye. At length the moment came for his final blessing, for his escort with their torches were waiting in the street, and they besought him for a last command which should be graven on their hearts. He told them he had given it already. It was his wish that his Daughters of the Visitation should imitate their Lord in His holy indifference: they were "to ask nothing and refuse nothing."

From the first that had been the centre of his teaching, and those who had been striving to yield themselves completely to the spirit of the Visitation had begun to have knowledge of the meaning of the charge, and the reality of

[1] *Année Sainte*, xii. 489.

the indifference it implied. Their Founder could not ask more of them than he had always asked, and, with the familiar words on his lips, he left them.

Some of the Sisters remembered afterwards that, applying his motto of indifference to ordinary life, he had said : " We must suffer whatever God may send us, whether it be cold or anything else." The cold in Lyons was intense, and the Bishop had been attacked by violent pains in the head since the hours of exposure on Christmas Eve. On the morning of S. John's Day, he said to his servants, " My sight grows very dim. That is a warning that it is time to go, for the decay of the body is a hindrance to the soul. All the same we must go on living so long as it pleases God."

Before saying Mass he made his confession to the Confessor of the Visitation ; and afterwards visited two Sisters in the infirmary and heard the confession of la Mère de Blonay, their Superior. When at length he came out of the church he met M. de Bellegarde, Governor of Burgundy. Intimate friendship did not cancel the rules of etiquette, and the Duke and the Bishop remained bareheaded while they talked. Before they parted the Governor of Lyons arrived on the scene, and from speech with him the Bishop hurried on to see M. de Nemours, to intercede for members of the ducal household threatened with dismissal. On his homeward way he encountered the Prince of Piedmont and again stood bareheaded in the cold. The day was far advanced and as yet he had had no food, and when he reached home he could eat little. His attendants, preparing to set forth on the homeward journey, saw by his looks that he was ill and quite unfit to travel. They watched him anxiously as he tried to write letters and chat to them. Since Christmas his courage had withstood the advancing tide of mortal sickness, and he had passed on from one task to another, fixing himself on each. He said he had learnt to take the claims upon him without anxiety or haste. " What we cannot do to-day we can do to-morrow, and what cannot be finished here can be finished in Heaven." [1] So he had written a few weeks earlier, with growing realisation

[1] *Œuvres*, XX. 1832, p. 151.

that for him little time remained for the finishing of work on earth.

In the afternoon of S. John's Day, 1622, in the gardener's cottage of the Visitation Convent at Lyons, François de Sales was stricken with apoplexy. At eight in the evening of the following day, being the Feast of the Holy Innocents, he died. The last scene has been described in all its painful detail, and we are permitted to observe the practice of that rule which he made the centre of his teaching. He asked nothing and he refused nothing. Surgeons of highest reputation seared his flesh with red-hot irons and manipulated plaisters that tore away the skin. Through the long hours of agony his friends and acquaintance, in an unbroken stream, passed in and out of the room where he lay dying, asking his blessing and plying him with questions and suggestions. Yet, while consciousness remained, the spirit of charity that made him the willing servant of all who needed him burned without flickering.

The Blessed Sacrament was exposed and prayer was made for him in all the churches during the thirty hours of his extremity of suffering, and when the tidings came that he was dead the city mourned as though one of her own sons was lost to her. Against all right or reason the claim that he should be laid to rest at Annecy was set aside, and high officials, aided by the King, decreed that the tomb of the Bishop of Geneva should be at Lyons. While the two factions disputed his coffin remained in the Church of the Visitation, and when, by producing the will made a few weeks earlier, when premonition of death was strong upon him, Annecy forced recognition of her right, Lyons did all that stately ceremony could do to show her reverence and her regret.

Three centuries have passed since mourning crowds followed that funeral procession to the eastern gate; the Bellecour Convent of the Visitation has disappeared; the streets surrounding it have altered; yet still the memory of François de Sales remains vividly present. Having once witnessed the passing of a Saint, Lyons continues to be mindful of her privilege.

PART II

THE "INTRODUCTION TO DEVOUT LIFE" AND ITS READERS

PART II

CHAPTER I

The Failure of Rose Bourgeois

François de Sales, in the preface of his "Introduction to Devout Life," attributes the being of his book to an individual, the original Philothée, who was the wife of his cousin Claude, Seigneur de Charmoisy. When the preface was written he had no premonition of the importance of the book; and even if he remembered that a good deal of it had been committed to paper, in one form or another, before he had any personal knowledge of Louise de Charmoisy he might still have given her the credit for its appearance. Actually she came under his spiritual direction only in 1607, while the book, which was published in 1609, contains the essence of the teaching he had been giving to the souls under his care since he had had opportunity to develop his ministry as a confessor, and may be regarded as bearing intimate relation to all his work for souls outside the limits of the cloister.

As far back as 1602 the new preacher from Savoy who charmed the fashionable folk in Paris had begun to assert the possibility of following Christ without fleeing from the conditions of ordinary life, and neither then nor afterwards was he content with mere assertion, he tried to show how the difficult feat might be accomplished. Henri IV, astute even in the affairs of the soul, discerned the value of his teaching and urged him to give it to a wider public, and he replied that the compilation of a book had part in his plans for the future.[1] Thus it is clear that the experience which is the background of his famous manual had begun before

[1] Deposition of M. des Hayes, quoted *Œuvres*, III. p. ix.

he had ever preached at Court, and when he became a bishop he had clear understanding of the need which it was to be his mission to supply. He found many devout souls among his acquaintance in Paris and in Savoy, "in towns, in households, at the Court, who by reason of their condition are obliged to lead an ordinary life in outward show." He taught them how they might sanctify that ordinary life.

The love of beauty and natural gaiety of heart belonged to the character of François de Sales. He knew that a soul which is fixed on God is not distracted by joy in outward things, and that delight in the using of His gifts may be purified till it becomes an aid to growth in grace. And as his letters show us, he was disposed to see a potential saint in most of those who approached him. There are no phrases which can convey the charity of François de Sales in his relations with his penitents; it would be hard to find in modern times, perhaps, a better illustration of all which that most excellent gift in actual truth implies. And it was part of the esteem that he accorded so readily to others that he assumed in them his own capacity for seeing all things in their true proportion. So he did not prohibit balls or comedies, and encouraged seemly attention to appearance.[1] Indeed he desired that men and women under his guidance should so fulfil the legitimate claims of the social order to which they were born, as to draw others, by their attractiveness, into association with their faith and purpose.

To certain directors who held cruder views on the discipline necessary as a background to devout living the book appeared to be dangerous, and they were violent in attack and criticism, but if the width of its tolerance has ever been used as a shelter for frivolity it is only by those who had no perception of the ideals of the writer. To read it with understanding is to see, gradually unfolded, the scheme of life as it would be lived if the soul were fixed on God. Its tolerance, if tolerant it be, will not accept half-measures, and it is an Introduction to a manner of Devotion that leaves little scope for sentiment. In fact this way of the devout life is steep and difficult, and if any be in doubt upon that point let them ponder the chapters dealing with humility.

[1] *Œuvres*, XVII. 1294, p. 371.

The well-worn aphorisms with which it opens serve to disguise its purpose. Honours are fleeting and beauty is vain, and he who prides himself on his possessions is no better than a fool; to make room for the Grace of God in our hearts we must empty them of self-esteem; and so on. And then by degrees the writer reveals a little of his own deep knowledge of souls. "There are many who will not and dare not reflect upon the gifts of grace God has bestowed on them for fear of vain glory and complacency, wherein they are certainly at fault." And passing from the scrupulous to the false effort after humility: "We say freely that we are nothing, that we are destitute and as the dust of the earth, but we should be very resentful if we were taken at our word and recognised as being what we call ourselves. Actually we pretend to run away and hide that we may be pursued and sought after; we appear to choose the lowest place at the feast only that we may be summoned more publicly to come up higher." "There are many who declare that they must leave meditation to the more advanced and that they are not worthy to attempt it; others protest they dare not make frequent Communion because they are not near enough to purity; others again are fearful of bringing devotion into disrepute if they have part with it, on account of their own vileness and frailty."

One by one these types of which he wrote stood clear before the mental vision of this most skilful of directors. Doubtless he had been tender to each individual, for the soul that can profit by imposed humiliation is already far advanced, and to beginners he never showed the sternness of his judgment. Only when memory recalled the travesties of virtue that he had witnessed and he could see their danger, detached from circumstances or individuals, did he express his true feeling regarding them: "All this is the merest affectation, a species of humility not simply false but evil, which secretly reflects upon the things of God, or—perhaps one should say—uses the pretext of humility to confirm self-sufficiency and to justify caprice and idleness."

François de Sales was not easily moved to denunciation, and in this case it is levelled at the offence and not at the offenders, and its vehemence is due in part to his own vivid

apprehension of the opposing virtue. The endeavour after humility must begin with the endeavour after the devout life, it must remain only an endeavour till the end, for complete attainment of humility implies perfection. That truth, with all it conveys of inspiration or of discouragement, was always present in his thoughts, and therefore it is well to form as clear an idea as we are able of his conception of humility. To do so we need not have recourse to his intimate letters to Ste. Chantal or to his instructions to members of contemplative orders; it is conveyed with unflinching directness to his penitents living in the world. He knew that approach to this virtue is more difficult than to any other, and is more beset with chances of hypocrisy and self-deception. The veriest beginner, awakening to a sense of sin for the first time and utterly confounded by the revelation of his own nature, may be complacent at the thought that he is humble before he is fully started on the way of penitence. And so through an infinite variety of conditions, even to that of the contemplative, we trace the same difficulty retarding the progress of the aspiring soul. Without humility there is no real advance, yet is it so elusive that the man who would grasp and hold it for himself will find his fingers clutching upon empty air.

S. François desired to banish all illusions on this subject from the minds of his readers. "True humility," he says, "makes no pretensions and has no use for humble phrases, for its desire to hide itself is even greater than its desire to hide any other virtues. . . . This is what I feel, Philothée: either we must use no expressions of humility or we must use them with real inward agreement . . . we must not seek the lowest place unless we do wholeheartedly desire to abide in it. . . . The man who is honestly humble prefers that it should be said of him that he is a failure, that he stands for nothing and is worthless, than that he should say it of himself: at any rate if he knows it is said he makes no attempt to deny it but agrees to it heartily; for that being his own view he is quite willing that others should share it."

"You wish to know, Philothée, which are the best means of self-abasement; and I tell you frankly that those most

profitable to the soul and most pleasing to God come to us by chance or by the natural circumstances of our lives, because we have not chosen them and have received them as God had ordained. . . . When we must choose, the hardest is the best, and that is hardest which is most opposed to our inclinations, for—let it be said once and for all—our own choice and decision spoils and impoverishes almost all our good endeavours."

As we increase in knowledge of those to whom S. François gave his most devoted service certain individuals connect themselves with the warnings and the exhortations on which he laid especial stress. There are passages about humility, emphasised as the virtue essential to devotion, which might have been inspired by conversation with Rose Bourgeois, Abbess of Puits d'Orbe, and addressed to her. For Rose Bourgeois was enslaved by pride. Caught up by the wave of sacred enthusiasm that swept over Dijon in 1604, she displayed notable capacity for response to the demand for self-scrutiny and new effort. And at first she seemed likely to do wonders. Conditions were in her favour, for she belonged to that grade of society with which François de Sales was intimate: she was sister to Mme. la Presidente Brulart, a leader among pious matrons in the city, she was the friend of Mme. de Chantal, and finally her position as Abbess of an Order requiring reform gave her special claim on the thought and care of one who held high ideals of life in Religion. Not one of the conversions wrought by that Lenten preaching held richer promise of result, and the preacher had good reason to look forward hopefully to the fruitful service awaiting her, even while he deplored the system that gave her the responsibility of ruling others. Actually the completeness of her surrender justified his hopes, and she gave immediate and practical expression to it. The Abbey of Puits d'Orbe was under Benedictine Rule, but the obligation of enclosure had long been set aside and the Community entertained friends and relations of both sexes freely and frequently. Here was the opportunity for the first step on the pathway to reforms of a more inspiring and attractive nature; and the necessity for it was so obvious to François de Sales that he made no calculation of

difficulties from within and the strength of opposition from without. When he rode away from Dijon the restoration of Religion at Puits d'Orbe seemed to be a definite part of the work that his Lenten preaching had begun, and the gradual waning of his confidence can only be traced in his letters to the Abbess. His dealing with her, although it is not distinguished by the keen insight for character of which we have such frequent proof elsewhere, bears peculiar testimony to the courtesy and patient tolerance that was ever the background of his genius in his work for souls.

The first of the letters from Annecy[1] shows his high expectations for Puits d'Orbe and its Abbess. He rejoices that the writings and life of S. Teresa are occupying her: "You will realise the greatness of her resolve to reform her Order, and that will certainly give you fresh ardour for the reform of your Monastery, for which you have far greater facilities than she had because you are Superior in perpetuity. But keep to the method I suggested to you and begin by setting an example; and even though at first it seems to have little effect, nevertheless have patience and you will see how God will work. And especially I urge upon you the spirit of gentleness, it is that which reaches hearts and wins souls. Be very careful in this beginning to be particular in all your exercises and be on your defence against temptations and contradictions, for the Evil One will raise a multitude to hinder the good that he knows is likely to come from your resolve; but God will protect you."

At this early stage the fervour of the young Abbess was of the headlong type that cannot tolerate an obstacle to swift advance. This is evident from the further warning despatched to her a few months later[2]: "You must be very careful to rouse no alarm on this subject of reform for, should you do so, all the more difficult spirits will be on their defensive and will stiffen themselves against you. Do you see the line to take? They must somehow reform under your guidance, of their own free will, and bend themselves to obedience and to poverty. But how is this to be brought about? Advance little by little, win the young plants that are there and inspire them with the spirit of obedience.

[1] *Œuvres*, XII. 218, p. 272. [2] *Ibid.* 231, p. 331.

Give them directions frequently but let it be on light and unimportant matters and when others are present; then encourage them over it, urging obedience with words of affection and suggesting beforehand: 'If I ask you to do this or that will you not do it gladly for the love of God?' . . . and when it has been done say: 'God will reward you for your obedience.' Thus you will be able to keep yourself in complete humility."

François de Sales seems at this stage to have had complete confidence in the stability of his convert; and certainly he practised with her the method, usual with him and often so fruitful, of assuming as the normal standard of a soul the highest standard it has ever touched. The reform of Religious Life must open with the clearance of small disorders from daily routine, and here the Abbess herself must set the pattern. The resolute and gentle ruler he portrayed, whose wish had the force of a command, must necessarily be at war with the imperfections in her own practice, and in every rule and suggestion he assumes that the inward struggle for self-dominion is constantly maintained.

The cultivation of the simple virtues did not, unfortunately, appeal to the imagination of Rose Bourgeois, and she craved for some sensational element even in her prayers. Her director found that Death, Judgment and Hell were the subjects for meditation she preferred, and he urged[1] the expediency of concluding them with "acts of love and confidence in God and not in fear and dismay; for when they end in fear they are perilous, especially all those that are on Death and Hell. Having considered the degrees of suffering and its eternity and being roused by the fear of it to resolve to serve God better, you should then picture the Saviour on the Cross and, flying to Him with outstretched arms, cling to His Feet while your innermost soul cries to Him in confident hope: 'O Door of my deliverance, Thy Blood is my safeguard! I am Thine, O Saviour, and Thou wilt save me!' Never fail to end on the note of hope, otherwise you will not be the better for such meditations."

The young Abbess had eager appreciation for the picturesque and it was the artist rather than the priest in

[1] *Œuvres*, XII. 231, 233.

François de Sales that stirred her. At his bidding she would have gone forth to any suffering, but even for him she could not stay at home to face monotony and the slow progress of the way of prayer and the depression of self-discovery. And so she wrote him despairing letters, and the counsel they evoked, though it failed of its immediate purpose, has remained for the assistance of other souls less wavering in resolve.

"The whole trouble is self-love and the high idea we have of ourselves. If we have not the stirring of tender feeling in our hearts, relish and realisation in prayer, interior delight in meditation, immediately we are despondent; if we have any difficulty in doing right, if there is anything to hinder us in good intentions, it must be overcome immediately and we are in a fever till we are rid of it. Why should this be so? Undoubtedly because we like to have consolations, and ease, and comfort. We want to do our praying steeped in essence of orange flowers and be virtuous over eating sugar, and we never let our glance rest on Jesus as He lies prostrate on the ground in sweat of blood and water from the desperate struggle within Him between the inclination of the natural will and the resolve of the supernatural.

"Self-love then is one root of our difficulties; and the other is this idea we have of ourselves. What does it show when we are surprised and disturbed and angry with ourselves because we have fallen into some imperfection or sin? Of course it shows that we thought ourselves resolute, stable, good for something, and, having reason to know we were mistaken, having fallen headlong, we are worried, disturbed and anxious. Whereas, if we had any idea of ourselves as we really are, instead of being astonished at tumbling down we should be puzzled as to how it is that we ever stay upright. That is the other root of our trouble: we want to have nothing except consolation, and we cannot bear to see and handle our own poverty and nothingness and folly." [1]

The fact of her discouragement shows us that Rose Bourgeois was not always self-deceived; but imagination

[1] *Œuvres*, XIII. 280, p. 28.

betrayed her in her plans for the future of the Community under her care.

When her director recommended the study of S. Teresa's writings, she saw herself at once as the leader of a movement that would bring the Community at Puits d'Orbe into line with the French Carmelites; and her suggestions for practices of austerity were not checked by a reminder from S. François that, so long as her Monastery gates were open to all comers, she was not conforming to the most elementary rule of Religious Life.[1]

As the months and years went on her protestations of good intention were constantly renewed. Nevertheless in 1607 François de Sales received a direct commission from the Pope to undertake the reform of the Monastery of Puits d'Orbe. In 1608 he journeyed there, and his reception inspired him with confident hope in the sincerity of the Abbess and her nuns.[2] When he returned to Savoy he wrote frequent letters of encouragement to them, undeterred by complicated business and days of travelling, and showed himself slow in realising that the fervour he had excited dispersed at his departure. A further visit a year later should have been conclusive, for the gates were still open and men as well as women were admitted to the dormitories of the nuns, yet François de Sales continued to believe in the qualities he had discerned in the Mother-Abbess at their first encounter. He had offered her then hardly less than he offered to Mme. de Chantal. "I beseech you to believe that I have nothing more at heart than your advancement before God," he had written to her, and it was proof of his esteem that he entrusted his youngest sister to her care.

Probably Rose Bourgeois deceived herself in her moods of penitence even more completely than she deceived her director, and he, hoping always, never failed to respond to any promise of effort, however tardy: "even if we may not hope to get so far as seemed possible in the glow of first conversion we will go—limping as we are—as far as possible."[3] Yet we get a glimpse of the aspect in which this charge appeared to him when it had exercised his patience and his charity for thirteen years.

[1] *Œuvres*, XIII. 328, p. 143. [2] *Ibid.* XIV. 476, p. 61. [3] *Ibid.* 527, p. 156.

During a visit to Thonon in 1617 he wrote to Mme. de Chantal[1]: "Mme. du Puits d'Orbe is coming, and it is not possible to leave my business here which is part of my office. Also if it was only a matter of one day I would manage to get there (to Annecy) and return; but, as you know, this mind discloses itself with difficulty—it takes days and days. Tell me what I can and ought to do about it—in your opinion?"

Actually the visitor to Annecy delayed too long elsewhere and did not get so far, but the problem of her coming, the eagerness to help in spite of overwhelming claims in other directions and the ineffectiveness of all the help already given, all this shows us the meaning of charity as S. François understood it and the cost of putting it in practice. Whatever the difficulty to himself, he saw the possibilities of a position as it affected others. "Come, my very dear Sister," he wrote from Thonon,[2] having decided to bestow on her the time so sorely needed for more fruitful labour, "and come with full intention of following my advice, for I give it from a heart to which your soul is infinitely dear. Mme. de Chantal awaits you eagerly; I believe you will find relief from your burden of distress when you have had a day with her and her daughters, for truly they are overflowing with holy love and gentleness."

No warmer welcome could have been offered to a returning prodigal, but it was not accepted. Instead the Abbess appeared some months later at Grenoble, where the Bishop was preaching Advent, and here "the days and days" which he knew she would demand may have been available. Certainly she opened to him her grief, and his wisdom and compassion and patience were lavished on her. And once again she responded, and protested penitence and good intention; and again, directly her personal touch with saintliness had ceased, she returned to the conditions she had promised to renounce. Then at last the news of her misdoing moved her director to acknowledge his defeat. "This is beyond my skill," he said.[3]

The Jesuit fathers in Dijon intervened and it was decided

[1] *Œuvres*, XVIII. 1331, p. 47.
[2] *Ibid.* 1332, p. 50.
[3] *Ibid.* 1387, p. 145.

that the Community should be removed from the woodland solitudes of Verdonnet to Chatillon sur Seine, where the Abbess would be under the jurisdiction of Sébastien Zamet, Bishop of Langres.[1] The last letter of the long series addressed to her by François de Sales was written in January 1617. It contains these words: "Finally, my very dear daughter, you need peace, and peace is born of humility." [2]

[1] See Prunel, *Sébastien Zamet*, Part I. ch. iv., for the melancholy sequel to the history of the Abbess Rose.

[2] *Œuvres*, XVIII. 1396, p. 162.

CHAPTER II

The Devout Lady

If we admit that some important chapters of the "Introduction to Devout Life" were inspired by observation of the Abbess of Puits d'Orbe, we shall find even clearer connection between that celebrated guide book and another member of the intimate circle of Mme. de Chantal. Mme. Marie Brulart, wife of a magistrate of Dijon and sister to Rose Bourgeois, must be numbered among the wayfarers that are not easy to direct. She had the vision of the goal and an unwavering desire to achieve it, only she was so obsessed by fear of mistake that the most careful indication of the route left her unsatisfied. When her director accomplished one long letter of response to doubts and questionings he found invariably that he had given occasion for another claim; and it was no easy task to hold her to reality, for her aspirations knew no limit.

The appeal of personality must be reckoned among the forces that brought conversion to so many souls in Dijon during the Lent of 1604, and it had its share in the awakening of Mme. Brulart as of the Abbess Rose. Unlike Mme. de Chantal, who went through recurrent agonies of misgiving on this score, Mme. Brulart had no fears of undue dependence and regarded herself as entitled by some natural right to the special care of her director. Sometimes, in the early days of their devout fellowship, these ladies in Dijon exchanged the letters that came to them from the Bishop of Geneva; and it would have been possible for Mme. Brulart to find in those addressed to herself a more tender note of consideration than was shown in his directions to Mme. de Chantal. Advice given to her was better suited for general use than that framed for the more valiant soul, and he

intended to compose for her assistance the instructions to the wife and mother living in the world which eventually found a place in his book on devout life.

As time passed, however, and his communications with Mme. de Chantal became increasingly intimate he made her the channel of his guidance to some of those who were beyond reach of personal intercourse. Armed with his suggestions he could trust her to give counsel to weaker souls; and we find him, when he realised the promise of influence his published work might offer, asking her to return these suggestions intended for the privileged few at Dijon.[1] Thus the second edition of his "Introduction," even more than the first, is indebted to the experience which the author gained from the needs of his friends in Burgundy.

"The vines that produce the best wine," wrote S. François,[2] "are the most prone to redundant growth and need the most pruning"—thus charitably he met a sensational outpouring from Mme. Brulart; and on the same sheet: "the discreet counsellor of souls never finds anything surprising but accepts everything with charity and with sympathy, knowing well that the spirit of man is subject to vanity and to disorder. . . . The surest way of devotion is found at the foot of the Cross: the way of humility, of simplicity, of gentleness of heart."

She found occasions for scruple in strange places and was keenly alive to every hindrance to devotion supplied by her obligations as wife and mother. The Bishop's response to certain of her protests on this point contains precious self-revelation. He showed her that persons who rise in aspiration above the level of their circumstances may raise what is lowly by their own self-offering to God, whereas those who, like himself, were pledged to an office of essential holiness must live in apprehension of lowering high things by personal shortcoming.[3]

It is clear that that acknowledgment is a revelation of his real mind. He had set himself a very exalted standard, and in his own opinion he never approached attainment; and because this was so he was better able to deal with

[1] *Œuvres*, XIV. 515, p. 131.
[2] *Ibid.* XIII. 347, p. 174.
[3] *Ibid.* 361, p. 215.

souls, for besides the example he set to the self-sufficient, it was easier for some of his penitents to declare their own weakness to one so dissatisfied with his own performance; no other form of sympathy contained like encouragement. Unfortunately Mme. Brulart could not reap the full benefit of her privilege, for she needed a clearer apprehension of the meaning of humility than she possessed to profit by so subtle an example. In an honest endeavour for the suppression of her own vanity she seems to have lived as far as she could in retirement, and having sacrificed outward display she showed intense eagerness to claim spiritual graces of the highest order. At one stage her level was so exalted that she felt the hearing of Mass to be an interruption and asked for leave to absent herself. The gentleness of her director did not make him less decisive in reply. "On every ground it is better that you should hear Mass daily and follow the Order of the Mass," he wrote,[1] "than that you should absent yourself on the plea that you prolong your prayer at home. I say it is better not only because to be present in spirit is no compensation for neglecting to be in the presence of the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord in the Mass—but also because the Church is so urgent we should assist at Mass."

She would have wished to recognise the Rule and be herself distinguished by exemption from it, and François de Sales was keenly alive to such indications of self-love. The spiritual conceits of Mme. Brulart drew from him some very valuable teaching. "I can well understand," he wrote, "that when you have been so fortunate as to feel you have found God it is best to seek to commune with Him, to regard Him and abide in Him; but, my dear daughter, I cannot think it is good for us who are still beginners to expect always, without preparation, to have these sudden meetings, and we need rather to consider the virtues of the Crucifix, one by one and in detail, than to contemplate them as a whole. Moreover if, when we have given our minds humbly to this preparation, God gives us neither sweetness nor delight, we must be ready patiently to eat our bread dry and do our duty without present reward."

[1] *Œuvres*, XV. 665, p. 25.

This was written at the moment when the coming of the French Carmelites had stirred the devout world of Dijon, and the contemplative life seemed, to such fervent souls as Mme. Brulart, the only condition promising peace or the satisfaction of legitimate desire. The Abbess Rose had been touched by the same infection, and both sisters found the suggestions of S. François as to the use of small opportunities of self-denial an inadequate response to their craving for heroic sacrifice.

"Persevere in conquering yourself in the small daily contradictions that disturb you," he wrote to Mme. Brulart[1]; "make that your chief desire. Understand that for the present God is asking nothing of you except that, so do not be diverted to anything else. Do not sow your desires in other people's gardens, keep all your labour for your own. Do not desire to be anything but what you are, desire only to be as good as possible as you are: fix all your thoughts on perfecting yourself in that and in bearing all crosses, small and great, that come your way."

Madame Brulart found it very difficult to bear small crosses. Her household harassed her, her husband showed little sympathy for any display of fervour in the practice of religion, even the priests with whom she had to do were a cause of exasperation. She saw the life of the cloister as a condition affording endless opportunity for pious dreaming, and the interior discipline of the religious and the cost thereof remained outside her calculations. Her director did not warn her against dreams, but he told her to spend an hour, or at the least a half-hour, daily in spiritual reading; and he showed more anxiety about the care needed in preparation for Communion than that she should have leave to approach the Altar very frequently. He impressed on her also her responsibility towards others: "It is not enough merely to seem devout and to love the devout life, it is your part to make everyone about you love it."

That was a very hard saying, for evidently she was one of those who regard the devout life as a personal possession, and she wished, in spite of her social duties and the claims

[1] *Œuvres*, XII. 217, p. 270.

of her husband and children, to have constant opportunity of retirement and solitude. In vain he urged upon her a truth which was his mainstay in the hardness of his own vocation. "Don't fancy when you are in the midst of the bustle which is a necessary part of your life that Our Lord is further from you than He would be if you had the luxury of quiet. No! my dear daughter, His coming into our hearts does not depend on the quiet of our surroundings but on the faithfulness of our love; it does not mean that we have the feeling of His sweetness, it means we have accepted His holy Will." [1]

The necessity of surrender echoes through the series of letters to Madame Brulart as in those to her sister the Abbess, and to each the lesson was distasteful. They thrilled to the thought of sacrifice if they might choose the method of it, but acceptance had no glamour.

"Remind yourself often that all the value of what we do depends on our conformity to the will of God, so that if I eat or drink because I know it is God's will I should do so, I am more pleasing to God than if I sacrifice my life for any other reason." [2] François de Sales had good right to preach on such a topic, for no man could be more strongly drawn to the seclusion of the student, while few vocations could carry with them claims more persistent or more harassing than his. He said himself that the constant interruption to which he was subject served as a schooling in detachment; and although he had not as yet evolved the motto given to the first Sisters of the Visitation, "Ask nothing and refuse nothing," he began to initiate Mme. de Chantal into the spirit of it as soon as his spiritual relation to her was established.[3]

With Mme. Brulart he was far more indulgent. "Your sense of belonging wholly to God is no deception," he wrote,[4] "but it implies a more intimate demand for the practice of virtues, and that you should make a special effort to achieve wherever you feel yourself to be most lacking. It is good to be conscious of response in prayer, nevertheless it is not good so to dwell on this that we lessen

[1] *Œuvres*, XV. 685, p. 53.
[2] *Ibid.* XII. 233, p. 350.
[3] *Ibid.* 240, p. 386.
[4] *Ibid.* XV. 751, p. 165.

our diligent endeavour to grow in virtue and to mortify our passions."

Thus, tenderly, at every stage of his dealing he strove to loosen her concentration on herself, whether in despair or in complacency. She wanted to vary fervour and delight in prayer with well-marked penance, and saw little attraction in the monotonous practice of self-restraint and kindliness. After four years' experience of her dispositions he summed up his teaching in a letter,[1] so full of knowledge of the subtle weaknesses hindering her advance that it might have offered stimulus to new conversion.

"Do not be over eager, no, give heed to what I say; train yourself to serve Our Lord with a gentleness that is both strong and vigilant. That is the true method for such service. Don't attempt everything at once but only certain things, and you are sure to achieve a great deal. Accept those mortifications that are most often required of you, for that is the task that must be put first, after that we will see what comes next. Often and with all your heart kiss those crosses that have been given to you by Our Lord Himself; never mind whether they be of rare and perfumed wood, they are more truly crosses if the wood is ugly, common, repulsive. It means much that this is so constantly in my mind and is always the burden of my song. Without question, my dear Sister, it is the song of the Lamb; it is a little sad but it is sweet and melodious: '*My Father*, so let it be, *not as I will but as Thou wilt.*'

"Magdalen sought Our Lord while she touched Him; she asked tidings of Him from Himself. She could not see Him as she pictured Him; this was the reason that she was not satisfied when she met Him but must needs seek Him elsewhere. She wished to behold Him clothed with glory, not in the common garb of a gardener; nevertheless when He called her by name: *Mary!* she knew Him for Himself.

"Do you see, my dear Sister, it is Our Lord appearing as the gardener that you meet daily in one place or another as you face the ordinary sufferings of your lot. You would like Him to give you other and finer forms of suffering. Truly what seems the finest is not the best. Don't you

[1] *Œuvres*, XIII. 404, p. 298.

believe that He calls to you: *Mary, Mary*? Make no mistake, before you see Him in His glory He intends to plant many flowers in your garden, humble little flowers but such as He likes; that is why He appears like this."

Despite many very human weaknesses and follies Mme. Brulart did not, so far as can be known, desist from the endeavour which began in the Lent of 1604, and so it is safe to assume that some of the humble little flowers were planted in her garden, even if it never held any of the choicer blossoms she had coveted. As the years passed on the difficulty of guiding a nature such as hers from a distance must have become more and more apparent, and her correspondence with François de Sales lessened gradually in volume until it ceased altogether. When Mme. de Chantal left Burgundy the links between Dijon and Annecy loosened, and the endeavour to guide Mme. Brulart in her alternate moods of exaltation and depression had to be abandoned. In this connection it is interesting to remember his own assurance, with regard to her sister the Abbess, that he could achieve what was needed only if he could deal face to face.[1] To Mme. Brulart he once explained his inability to give the help she asked by his ignorance of "all the details of her need."[2] She died in 1622, and her name occurs very rarely in the correspondence of François de Sales after 1610, so that her association with him is connected solely with the "Introduction to Devout Life" and the experience that produced it. Her claim to consideration is a strong one, however, for having been gifted with special skill in depicting weakness and follies which were not peculiar to herself, she employed it to such good purpose that the letters addressed to her contain counsels and prescriptions for the healing of troubled souls in every generation.

If it is the case that she failed fully to profit by them herself, that does not lessen their intrinsic value. In particular the charge that devotion should be made attractive was impressed on her. François de Sales can be eloquent on such a point as this; and it is possible that he abandoned his efforts to guide from Annecy because he had tidings of conspicuous failure in this particular. More than once we

[1] *Œuvres*, XIV. 462, p. 39. [2] *Ibid.* XIII. p. 259.

find humorous indication of his sympathy with M. Brulart, a man of high reputation and senior magistrate in Dijon; and events proved that his misgivings as to the discretion of Mme. Brulart in the practice of her religion were well founded. When in 1621 admirers of the Visitation desired to establish a new House in the city of Dijon, we find the senior magistrate, Nicholas Brulart, taking the lead in vigorous opposition.[1] From which it must be inferred that the devout life, as Mme. Brulart practised it, had not won his approval.

[1] *Œuvres*, XX. 1847, p. 175, *note*.

CHAPTER III

The Authentic Philothée

We have shown the two sisters, Rose Bourgeois and Mme. Brulart, to be the most prominent among those who shared the task of the authentic Philothée and supplied François de Sales with the experience essential for the writing of his book. It is a relief, having paid the attention due to them, to turn from their eccentricities to the simpler nature of Louise de Chastel—Mme. de Charmoisy.

It is possible that François de Sales and Philothée met during his stay in Paris in 1602. She was the young wife of his cousin, who was in attendance on M. de Nemours there, and she belonged to the Norman aristocracy and had been a maid of honour at an age when other children are under nursery discipline. She had an assured place in the social world of Paris, and she came to Savoy as a stranger. A letter from M. de la Bretonnière,[1] Secretary of State to M. de Nemours, after a visit to her at the Castle of Folliet in the Chablais, lays stress on her solitude and urges that her husband should not leave her there alone. Possibly the reserve which François de Sales found it so hard to break may be attributed to the isolation of her early married life as a foreigner in a society where everyone had ties of kinship to the rest.

On May 20, 1606, he wrote[2] from Annecy to the Castle of Marclaz (which had been so familiar and friendly a refuge in his years of missionary endeavour), and although he said of himself that he had no liking for ceremony he addresses "Madame ma Cousine" with more formality than even the customs of a ceremonious age demanded. He knew that

[1] Vuy, *La Philothée de François de Sales*, p. 36.
[2] *Œuvres*, XIII. 350, p. 179.

she had concentrated her thought and energy upon a lawsuit in which her husband's family had been involved for many years; and while he watched her with attention he made no advance until the right moment should arrive. It may be that she remained entirely aloof until the spring of 1607, when she came to the great house in the rue Ste. Claire which still bears the family name, to seek rest and distraction after long attendance upon lawyers and in the Law Courts at Chambéry. The Church of S. Dominique was chosen for the Bishop's Lenten sermons; and its atmosphere must have had special charm for one who had just emerged from the sordidness and squabbling of a lawsuit.

A letter to Mme. de Chantal at Dijon tells of the result of those weeks of quiet. "Lent is the harvest time of souls, as you know well, my dear daughter," wrote François. "I had not preached Lent in this dear town since I became Bishop until now, except the first Lent when everyone was busy watching me to see how I was going to behave, and I had all I could do to find my feet and to make arrangements for the work of the diocese which had so newly fallen to me. Now understand that I begin to do a little reaping. . . . Our sacred nets have just drawn in a fish which I have longed to capture for four years. I will not conceal that I am delighted, extremely delighted. I commend her to your prayers that Our Lord may confirm in her heart the intentions He has placed there. She is a lady and she is all gold, eminently fitted for the service of her Saviour; so that if she perseveres she will be fruitful in service."

Thus did the Philothée of "La Vie Dévote" assume individuality for the group surrounding François de Sales and, after brief delay, take her own place among the number of his intimate friends. "She had been brought up at Court and was endowed with all those advantages which the world prizes; her education and her gifts disposed her to worldliness and filled her heart with love of vanities that do not accord with Christian graces; nevertheless being touched by the utterances of this apostolic preacher she came to throw herself at his feet and to assure him of her desire to be converted and to surrender herself entirely to

God." [1] So runs the record of the event in the annals of the Visitation; a record necessarily retrospective and so perhaps a little more dramatic than the facts warranted, but precious for its vivid realisation of the parting of the ways, for Louise de Charmoisy and for so many others after her, when they heard the call to follow Christ from the lips of François de Sales and dared to make response. In her case, however, conquest was achieved by slow stages. No doubt the impression of the Lenten sermons could not easily be obliterated, but by temperament she was reserved, and the preacher's reputation for personal influence would have disposed her to assume an attitude of defence. If indeed she was surprised into such a gesture of surrender as the tradition of the Visitation implies it was not confirmed by her subsequent bearing, and nearly a year had passed since that first proclamation of victory before its effects were in any degree assured. Her reason had been convinced and she was faithful in outward observance; it was the inner yielding of entire confidence that she withheld.

"Until the last few days she has never written a word to me about her soul," François de Sales declared in March 1608,[2] and a few days later he notes that she has drawn a little closer to the foot of the Cross and towards submission to her spiritual father—"which does not mean she failed to do so before, but that she is doing so now more openly and definitely." She was at Chambéry that Lent, claimed by the lawsuit, and he was preaching at Rumilly, so that all communication was by letter, and perhaps she found it easier to yield when there could be no risk of yielding to the force of personality. The real work had been done at Annecy, however, from the Dominicans' pulpit, and by that chance association which near neighbourhood necessitated; and when his faith and patience at length broke down the reserve that hid her from him, he met her tardy revelation of herself with counsel enriched by deep experience of souls.

In the months succeeding the Lent course at Annecy, letter after letter was despatched to her, and, as the great sheets covered with the Bishop's writing began to accumulate, her aptitude for selection (proved by the arrangement

[1] *Année Sainte*, i. 603. [2] *Œuvres*, XIII. 432, p. 366.

of family papers for the family lawsuit) was exercised upon them. Being at Chambéry that spring she was able to show her treasure to the Jesuit Père Fourier. No other opinion could have had greater weight with François de Sales, and when Père Fourier urged upon him that the letters should be published, he accepted the task of adapting them for general use and set to work at once. The book was printed at Lyons and probably did not appear until January 1609. The preface to the third edition, dated from Annecy on the Feast of S. Mary Magdalene in that year, claims that a "vigorous and constant soul can live in the world without receiving any worldly taint,"—and that the object of the book is to show how this can be done. "It is true that this is not an easy task," says the author, "and for this reason I should like many to undertake it with more zeal than has been shown up to the present."

In the few pages of this preface we find a striking revelation of the mind of François de Sales. It was natural that the widespread effect of his book should suggest that he had a mission to proclaim the possibility of holiness for persons who cannot withdraw from outward pomps and vanities; it did more than this, however, it showed him his vocation as the guide of individuals. From time to time his flock heard rumours of his promotion to high dignity in the Church or to some great office outside the borders of Savoy; plainly his gifts were recognised, and wise men may well have urged that the benefit of them would not be given to the world so long as precious time and thought were lavished freely on all who asked for his direction in the way of holiness. The response of unknown voices to his "Introduction" declared to him that he had power not possessed by others and, seeing this vocation as a privilege, he defended it:

"I say with the great S. Denis, that it appertains specially to Bishops to lead souls to perfection, since their order is supreme among men; so that their leisure cannot be better employed than about such business." And leaving principle and authority that he may show his private mind in the matter: "It is a labour, I confess, to undertake the direction of individual souls, but one which brings

withal much comfort ; it is a labour which cheers and stimulates the heart."

It is not a matter for wonder that the " Introduction " prefaced with these words served as an invitation, and strangers from far distant places found their way to Annecy that they might describe their malady to this skilled physician. His vast correspondence shows the volume of the demands made upon him; and from the crowd of those he tended only a very few can be distinguished to show the methods of his treatment. Among them all Louise de Charmoisy has the strongest claim to represent " the vigorous and constant soul living in the world " for which he had special sympathy. In her there are no traces of insincerity, and when her reserve had broken down her approach was as simple as he could desire.

" When I first confided my soul into the hands of this Servant of God," she said in her deposition, " there occurred conditions which might have recalled me to the Court and, as I dreaded this extremely, I went to consult the said Servant of God, explaining my fears to him. He said to me ' Take courage, my daughter, and do not be afraid that you will fall back because of this ; for if you are faithful to God He will never fail you, and though the sun and moon must be stopped for it He will give you time enough for your spiritual exercises and for everything else that you ought to do.' "

Because she was disposed to gravity he wrote to her more lightly than to others and with that confidence in understanding which he showed only to few. She may indeed be numbered among his intimate friends, and he and she were associated in an experience that made their friendship stronger. The episode is characteristic of the period and of the despotic powers so often wielded by unworthy hands. Claude de Charmoisy and two brothers of François de Sales were attached to the household of M. de Nemours, Governor of Annecy and head of the younger branch of the House of Savoy. The subordination of Nemours to Savoy was not sufficiently defined to prevent incessant jealousies, and behind the squabbles of the two dukes lay constant apprehension as to the position of each

towards France. Thus appeal from Nemours to Charles Emmanuel proved fruitless, and when the Governor was in residence his will was law in Annecy. Under the influence of an unworthy favourite Nemours abused his power; and members of the old families of Savoy were special objects of malice to the upstart they had slighted. These conditions reached their climax in the year 1613; when, defying every rule of justice and good faith, the Duke hurled sentences of exile and imprisonment broadcast among those who had spent their lives in his service.

François de Sales passed a distracted Lent in Annecy striving to adjust a situation as prolific of peril to its authors as to their victims. He shared in the disgrace of his class, however, and would have suffered materially had the Governor held authority over the Bishop; and his suggestions as to the mere worldly advantage of equity and prudence went unheeded. Among innumerable instances of injustice none was more flagrant than that of Claude de Charmoisy. He had been attached to the Court from his childhood, and the first blow which deprived him of his appointments was a very heavy one; it was followed by a sentence of exile and confinement.

His place of imprisonment was his own Castle of Marclaz, the refuge of François de Sales during his most dangerous months in the Chablais, and it may seem that there were ameliorating conditions in such a form of banishment. Marclaz stands on the fertile plain of the Chablais between the Fortress of Allinges and Lake Geneva; its grounds are watered by a rushing river, and sloping meadows and shady woods surround it—to the courtier wearied with diplomacy and politics or the soldier freed from military service it presented an ideal refuge, but as a place for confinement of indefinite duration it may well have inspired despair. The absence of Mme. de Charmoisy served as an aggravation of misfortune. Business of an urgent kind had necessitated a journey to Paris and she was there when the blow fell. Possibly François de Sales alone had full comprehension of all that the calamity implied. He knew the temperament of his kinsman, the remoteness of Marclaz, and the vicarious suffering of which Mme. de Charmoisy was capable.

"It is now when you are in trouble," he wrote to her,[1] "that you must show that you really bear to Our Saviour the love about which you have so often promised and protested in my presence. It will be a great relief to me to know this as the inclination of your heart.

"Seek the prayers of S. Louis who after a long time spent in assisting and nursing the victims of the plague in his army counted it a privilege to die of it and used this prayer as his last utterance: 'Oh, my God, I will worship in Thy temple and praise Thy name.' Resign yourself to the divine will and your way and all that concerns your husband's imprisonment will be ordered for the best.

"Be of good courage, my dear Daughter, let your trust be fixed on Him to Whose service you are dedicated and surrendered, for He will not forsake you. And meanwhile with my whole heart I shall work for your husband with everyone who might have any interest towards obtaining his release and who are disposed to bestir themselves for me; already since the day before yesterday I have embarked on this good cause, for I hold you and all that is yours as dear as if in reality you were my daughter, for the love of Our Lord to Whom you belong, Whose Will be done for ever and ever. Amen."

The friend and kinsman mourns misfortune, the loyal subject of Savoy laments unchecked injustice, but the director can rejoice that God has chosen to test a soul surrendered to Him. "That which we receive purely from the will of God is always very acceptable to Him, provided that we receive it with a willing heart, and for the love of His holy will; where there is less of our own there is more of God. The simple and entire acceptance of the will of God makes suffering extremely pure."[2] Reading those lines in the time of her prosperity Philothée, and many another, assented and admired unreservedly, and the same principle reappeared so often in the teaching of her director that it was identified with him. He was no advocate of self-imposed suffering; instead he required acceptance of it when it came and an acceptance that was simple, entire and even willing.

In the case of Louise de Charmoisy there was temptation

[1] *Œuvres*, XV. 863, p. 365. [2] *Introduction*, Part III. ch. 16.

to escape distress as well as to rebel against it. She was not yet thirty and extremely attractive, and she found herself a welcome guest in Paris. The letters of Antoine des Hayes,[1] the friend of her husband as of François de Sales, paints her as she appeared to the world. He says he had an ardent desire to be of some service to her, and was only hindered by the fact that everyone with whom she came in contact shared that desire with him. Madame de Guise wanted her as a maid of honour, and she might have justified acceptance of that office on the plea that she could do far more to aid her husband in his misfortune while she enjoyed the pleasures natural to her age and rank than was possible if she returned to share the monotony of his seclusion. She never wavered, however, in her purpose as fixed when she started on her journey. Business brought her to Paris, and when she had completed it she set out on her homeward way undeterred by the danger of the frostbound roads or the hindrance of short days. In February 1614 she reached Marclaz, to find her husband freed from the severity of his original sentence but still under the ban of the Duke's displeasure and not permitted to return to visit Annecy.

The confused political developments that involved the fortunes of the House of Charmoisy have no interest save as showing the self-mastery required of those who in the midst of them preserved a tranquil mind. While his most faithful followers were still under suspicion Nemours himself turned traitor and gave his aid to Spain against Savoy. In the general upheaval that ensued his victims escaped from the pressure of injustice and were restored to place and favour by Charles Emmanuel. A succession of appointments fell to the lot of M. de Charmoisy, culminating with the summons to accompany the Cardinal Maurice on the same mission that, in November 1618, brought François de Sales to Paris. And when the marriage of Nemours (repentant and reconciled) to Anne of Lorraine was announced, the choice for the post of lady-in-waiting fell on Louise de Charmoisy. Thus it seemed that Fortune smiled again on the family at Marclaz, and Philothée would have no further occasion for any extreme practice of detachment.

[1] Vuy, *op. cit.* Vol. I. pp. 203–215.

And then, in the midst of the preparations for the journey from Chambéry to Paris, mortal illness seized on Claude de Charmoisy and he died. This was at the end of October. His wife lay sick at Marclaz, and those attached to the Cardinal's suite were obliged to set out for Paris. The time must have seemed long to Louise de Charmoisy in her bereavement before a letter from François de Sales could reach her.

"My heart is fixed on thoughts of you, my very dear cousin," he wrote,[1] "and longs for nothing save to speak to you in so far as it can speak, yet knows not what to say, except that the Divine Partner of our souls would have us see everything that happens to us under the shelter of His Providence and set all our affections on eternity, where we shall meet again never to be separated. O my daughter, how is it that we ever let ourselves grow confident and fixed in the vanity of this perishing world? Our hopes are in things above, and there we must set our affections also. And so now you are facing the real test of the faithfulness you owe to God to whose keeping you have so often resigned all that may happen to you. My very dear cousin, uplift your heart and hold the sacred Crucifix upon your breast to still your sobs and sighing. Be altogether His and I can promise you that He will be altogether yours.

"For myself—I cannot say that I am more than ever, but if that were possible I should be more than ever, yours, inseparably and altogether, without conditions or reservations—FRANÇOIS, BISHOP OF GENEVA."

This was no empty protestation. While he remained in Paris the Bishop of Geneva laboured strenuously in the interests of his "very dear cousin" and gave her very wise advice.[2] She had his help when the time came to settle the momentous question of the best marriage for her daughter, and he intervened with kindly wisdom when her judgment went astray in her dealing with her son. Henri de Charmoisy was attached to the Court of Savoy immediately after his father's death, being then in his eighteenth year. He displayed little fervour in the practice of his religion, and seems to have been a source of anxiety rather than

[1] *Œuvres*, XVIII. 1485, p. 311. [2] *Ibid.* 1521, p. 382.

consolation to his widowed mother. The letters of François de Sales, however, throw a light on her dealings with her son which suggests that the faults in their relations to each other were not on one side only. For instance, when Prince Thomas of Savoy, having Henri de Charmoisy in his suite, visited Annecy, the Bishop wrote to his "very dear cousin"[1] at Marclaz that he felt obliged to scold her a little because her son was not dressed as befitted either his rank or his place at Court, for "besides the disheartening effect it has upon himself to see all his fellows better equipped, his friends are much displeased at it, some of them have spoken about it to me with energy. There is no getting out of it, my very dear Daughter, as we are in the world we must follow its standard in such things as do not run counter to the Law of God."

It is satisfactory to know that Henri de Charmoisy visited Geneva soon after this letter was written, and ordered apparel at a cost of 675 florins; nevertheless, if the Bishop had succeeded in imbuing his Philothée with the true spirit of his teaching his intervention would not have been required. Nor is this the only indication of his failure. A little later he is impelled to further remonstrance.

"I must order you to take care of your health," he wrote,[2] "for I am assured on very good authority and in all good will that you do not take sufficient rest for its preservation, that you are less sparing than is needful in the use of your strength and more sparing of your means than is right. But the important part of this is that they tell me no one dares to speak to you about it. And as far as I am concerned I do not hesitate to speak to you of this and of anything else, seeing that you are my very dear cousin and Daughter, and I am

"Your very humble and unchanging cousin and servant,

"FRANÇOIS, BISHOP OF GENEVA."

This letter, written February 28, 1622, is the last of the collection addressed to Mme. de Charmoisy.

Twenty-two years remained for her after the death of S. François in which she might give proof that she had

[1] *Œuvres*, XXI. 1846, p. 172. [2] *Ibid.* 1898, p. 273.

received the treasure her director desired to impart—a treasure whose priceless worth was wholly independent of any human suggestion or support. These years gave scope for practice in detachment. Since her marriage she had devoted her keen energy and wit to serve the interests of her husband's family; nevertheless her son showed himself insolently hostile, and having married against her wishes, ejected her from Marclaz. Her health, always uncertain, failed her early, and her Norman birth induced a certain isolation even after thirty years in her adopted country. Perhaps the memory of François de Sales was the more present with her on that account, and she clung to all outward reminders of the past. In 1623 she bought the house in the rue Vallon at Thonon that had been his refuge during the dangerous period of his mission-work, and lived there at intervals, until she gave it for a new foundation of the Visitandines and retired to her Castle of Villy. And at Villy, which stands in the plain of the Chablais and is near to the Castle of Brens, to Annemasse, to La Roche, and a score of other places whose names are linked to incidents in his career, she died.

CHAPTER IV

The Courtier and the Saint

From the published correspondence of François de Sales it would be natural to conclude that the privilege of his direction was reserved almost entirely for priests and for women, and the traditional connection between his books and the special individuals to whom much of his teaching was addressed strengthens this impression. But the Depositions and other records concerning him make it clear that his influence was as great among the men of his generation as among the women. His nephew and biographer, Charles Auguste de Sales, drew much of his material from the testimony of personal friends; and study of his pages should do much to correct the effect of undue emphasis on one part of the manifold labours that went on unceasingly for thirty years.

The frequent journeys undertaken by the Bishop brought him into personal contact with men of all conditions in the diocese. They had many opportunities to consult him on spiritual and also on practical matters, and the number of his letters written to enlist interest, or to procure some benefit for obscure persons with no obvious claim on him, makes it evident that he was in a very real sense "the father in God" of his widely scattered flock. And besides the visitations which made the Bishop a familiar figure in every quarter of Savoy, innumerable motives brought men of every type to Annecy, and there they found the home of the Bishop almost at the entrance of the Castle, the centre of civil life. There must have been many suitors for the clemency or the generosity of Nemours who turned away in disappointment from the Castle to find advice and consolation at the Hôtel Favre. Truly no Savoyard could account

himself as friendless while François de Sales remained in residence.

The loving-kindness that won hearts prepared the way for winning souls, and men of every rank and calling were drawn into his net. For this his pen was rarely needed, and it is only here and there that his direction to a soldier or a courtier or a statesman is preserved in writing. We may be sure, however, that when a layman required counsel he knew where it might be had, for, by the secular surroundings of his own youth and his intimacy with his own kinsmen, the Bishop had been made familiar with the temptations and difficulties of ordinary life. A letter [1] supposed to be addressed to Celse-Bénigne, the only son of Madame de Chantal, depicts, with the wisdom of real experience, the possibilities of the devout life for a young courtier, and, it should be noted, the writer does not desire flight in face of the many dangers he visualises ; he would have them faced and overcome.

" I am not so timid as are many and do not look on the Court as the most dangerous place for souls that are brave and well-intentioned, for there are only two prominent reefs in that whirlpool : vanity which ruins those that are idle and slack and unstable, and ambition which destroys the bold and self-confident. . . .

" Now, Monsieur, as it is your wish that I should speak in this way to you, your safeguard from these reefs is to continue to sustain your spiritual strength that you may stand firm against vanity and be unshaken by ambition. Be faithful in frequent Communion and believe me that there is no other means by which you will get equal help in maintaining virtue. And for the right ordering of this practice secure the guidance of some good Confessor and ask him to make it his business to call you to account in confession for any lapses from regularity in this, should you chance to make any. Always be humble in confession and have real and definite intention of amendment. Never forget (and this I do urge upon you) to ask help of Our Lord on your knees before you leave home, and to ask forgiveness of your faults before you go to rest.

[1] *Œuvres*, XIV. 637, p. 376.

"Above all else beware of dangerous books and for nothing in the world allow yourself to be influenced by a sort of writing applauded by frivolous minds because of the useless subtleties they discover in it, like that miserable Rabelais and certain others of our day who make it their business to cast doubt on everything, to disdain everything and to make fun of all old-established maxims. . . . I beseech you to be on your guard so that you do not become involved in love affairs and do not allow your fancy to overrule reason and judgment in choosing objects of affection; for if once you give rein to fancy your judgment is dragged at its heels and you very soon arrive at decisions that are very ill-advised and regrettable.

"I would have you profess your intention openly from the beginning of living virtuously, sensibly, faithfully and as a Christian and declare it by your manner and bearing and speech. I say virtuously so that nobody shall attempt to lead you into dissipation. Sensibly so that you are not betrayed into any exaggeration making outward show of your resolve, but only such as wise people would esteem as suited to your condition. Faithfully because unless you maintain your purpose unwaveringly, it runs risk from the assault of miscreants who assail others to drag them down to their own level. And finally as a Christian, because there are so many who pretend to desire to be good by the laws of philosophy who nevertheless are not so, nor are by any means capable of being so, but are nothing more than parodies of virtue, able with those who do not see them constantly, to disguise bad behaviour and bad temper by austerity of looks and speech. But for us who know so well that we have not the smallest grain of goodness save by the grace of Our Lord, it is needful that we should cultivate devotion and piety if we would be good; otherwise our goodness will merely be imagination and shadow. Thus it is extremely important to declare in good time what we intend to be always; and this is a thing that allows no compromise. . . .

"And you must let me give you one very special charge. Take heed, Monsieur, for I am fearful lest you should turn to gambling. I fear it because it would prove a great

misfortune to you. It is able in a few days to wreck your soul and wither all your good intentions. It is the practice of the idler, and of those who want to advertise themselves as playing with great folk, declaring that to be the quickest means of making a mark. . . .

" Further I would have you show a bold heart in refusing to pamper your body by daintiness in eating, in sleeping or other weakness of the kind, for truly a generous soul must always have misgivings about bodily luxury and indulgence. It was said by Our Lord, however, that they who wear gorgeous apparel dwell in Kings' Houses, and on this account I want to speak of it. Our Lord did not mean to say that all who live at court must wear gorgeous apparel, all He says is that those who wear gorgeous apparel as a rule do live there. Nor is it with outward furnishings that I am concerned but with the inward, as far as outward seemliness goes you have too much knowledge for it to be my place to say anything.

" I do want to say, though, that I would have you ill-treat your body now and then, inflicting on it some measure of hardship by the avoidance of what is delicate and by frequently refusing it whatever is pleasant to the senses, for it is desired that the will should sometimes show in this way that it holds rule, and assert the degree of its power over sensual appetites.

" *Mon Dieu !* I grow prosy—and truly I do not know what I have written, for I write without leisure and piecemeal. But you know how I feel at heart and you will not find fault. . . . Love me always as if I belonged to you, for so I do in Our Lord and I desire for you every blessing in this world and still more in the next. God bless you and hold you in His Holy Hand. And now to end as I began : you are about to launch out into the world's open sea, do not on that account change either your captain, or your mast, or your sail, or your anchor, or your wind. Always have Jesus Christ for your Captain, His Cross for your mast on which your resolutions can be stretched as a sail ; let your anchor be your profound trust in Him and you start fair. May the fair wind of celestial guidance fill the sails of your barque ever more and more, and bring you safely

into the port of eternal blessedness, this is the constant wish, Monsieur, of your most humble servant,

" François, Bishop of Geneva."

As an appendix to the " Introduction to Devout Life " this letter would be in its right place; the unexpected points where the rigidity of ordinary rule is relaxed, the searching demand implied by some of its suggestions, the elaborate imagery of the conclusion, all are in tune with the directions to Philothée. Not only does his warning spring from experience of the world, but obviously his knowledge of his correspondent was of the closest and most personal kind. This youth, about to embark on the perilous waters of a courtier's life, had given his confidence and asked for help. François de Sales, as he points him to the way of the Cross, does not attempt to disguise the difficulty of following it; he stresses the need for renunciation and self-discipline; and to make such a demand on Celse-Bénigne showed a tinge of recklessness, for the son of Mme. la Baronne de Chantal had already been called to sacrifice in the name of religion. Yet the ultimate result justified the conclusions of this skilled director. Celse-Bénigne, at certain stages of his brief career, caused agonised misgiving to those who loved him, and then added lustre to an honourable name and died gallantly.

Charles Emmanuel is in part responsible for the dearth of spiritual letters to men from the pen of François de Sales. The restrictions prompted by his jealousy deprived the subjects of the King of France, whether soldiers or courtiers or ecclesiastics, of the counsels of the Bishop of Geneva unless they sought for them within the frontiers of Savoy; and the exchange of letters that maintained friendship of long standing was hampered by necessity of caution. Only a person of very high authority could be exempt from interference, and no series of counsels addressed to a layman can be found in the volumes of correspondence, save those to Roger de Bellegarde, duke and peer of France. The treaty, concluded at Lyons in 1601, that ceded the Province of Gex to the French Crown brought Bellegarde into the diocese of Geneva as the representative of Henri IV. His acquaintance with François de Sales dated from the autumn of 1602,

when the Bishop-elect, placing the interest of the scattered Catholics in a Calvinist district before every other consideration, came to Gex on his return from Paris. M. le Duc de Bellegarde, as Governor of Burgundy, had dealings with him then, and showed himself to be ardent in support of the Catholic cause ; but the stream of life swept the two apart after that episode and their relations were merely formal until the summer of 1613. Then business affairs brought them together. The courtier had left youth behind (although he was of a temperament that retains the follies and vanities of youth long after their fitting season) ; the Bishop had grown in knowledge of the ways of the world and of the souls of men. And the bond of friendliness that had held for eleven years was transformed into a chain which neither distance nor death could sever. At Saint-Claude, already memorable to the Founders of the Visitation, Bellegarde made a life confession before François de Sales and asked for his spiritual direction.

The manners and morals of society in the days of the Valois, of Henri IV, and during the Regency of Marie de Medici are indicated in various contemporary memoirs. It would seem that Bellegarde, born in the atmosphere of the Court and bred to familiarity with all the licence and intrigue and cruelty that flourished most when Catharine de' Medici ruled, must have hesitated long before he submitted to the demands of François de Sales. The obstacles to correspondence existed in his case as much as in that of any other Frenchman, but it is possible that, being by birth and position so highly placed, he could override them. Despatches from the Bishop of Geneva to the Governor of a portion of his diocese must have been immune even from the vigorous censorship of Charles Emmanuel. To this chance of office we owe the series of letters addressed to him, covering a period of nearly ten years (for the last was written on Christmas Eve, 1622, at Lyons), and each one containing some reference to their spiritual relationship.

It is most likely that Bellegarde inspired hopes in the mind of François de Sales which he never fulfilled, but a confessor must become increasingly accustomed to disappointment as experience widens, and in this instance

there was no deliberate rejection. One of the incidents recorded during the tragic Christmas festival of 1622 is a long conversation between the Duke and the Bishop; and the impression of it cannot have faded from the memory of one who had been in his best moments so truly the penitent of a saint. It is, however, with that period of the courtier's life when he made the new resolutions following on conversion that we are chiefly concerned; and the moderation of the director's requirements at this point is worthy of note. François de Sales refers repeatedly to his courage and shows him a respect that is deeper than the language of compliment. And the letter establishing the connection begun at Saint-Claude displays the eagerness to visualise an unfamiliar environment that is so often to be found at the opening of his correspondence with individuals who had special need of him.

"Blessed be God eternal," he wrote,[1] "for His goodness towards your soul, Monsieur, in thus inspiring you so strongly with the resolution to consecrate the remainder of your mortal life to the interests of life eternal. . . . But if God has so kindly prompted you to aspire to everlasting glory He pledged you there and then to receive His prompting humbly and follow it faithfully. . . . For this reason I beg you, Monsieur, with my whole heart, to be very careful to lay hold on that which you have lest you should forfeit your crown. You are called unquestionably to a practice of devotion that is manly, courageous, steadfast, to be as a lode-star to others, declaring the reality of heavenly love; the fitting reparation for past failures if you have ever yielded to the vanity of earthly love.

"I beg you to observe, Monsieur, how I give rein to my fancy and how I am carried away by this name of father with which you have chosen to honour me. It has made its way into my heart and stirred in me an impulse to the type of love that it suggests, the greatest, keenest, strongest type of love. As its result, Monsieur, I must renew my petition that you will be diligent in using the exercises I mark in chapters X, XI, XII, and XIII of the second part of the *Introduction* for morning and evening, for spiritual

[1] *Œuvres*, XVI. 906, p. 56.

withdrawal, and for aspirations towards God. The goodness of your heart and the high resolve that God has given you will aid you in these practices, which will be all the easier for you because they need only moments stolen, or fairly claimed, from other employments, here and there, as occasion offers. The tenth part of an hour or even less will suffice for the morning—and the same in the evening.

"Oh! if you could quietly beguile your soul, Monsieur, and inasmuch as you have undertaken to make your communion monthly for a year (and the year contains twelve months) you could, when you reach the twelfth, go on to the thirteenth, and then the fourteenth, and then the fifteenth, and so continue, passing on from month to month, what a blessing it would bring upon you! For the more often you receive your Saviour the more perfectly He can convert you. And this, Monsieur, might very well happen without any show, without affecting ordinary interests and without the world knowing anything about it. Experience has shown me, in the years that I have been at the service of souls, the all-powerful effect of this divine Sacrament in confirming good intentions, in preserving from evil, in giving consolation, in a word in sanctifying life here in this world, provided it be frequented with the faith, the purity and the devotion that are due."

"The tenth part of an hour or even less will suffice." Such phrases as that suggest the difficulty of guiding one so tied and bound by chains of high estate as the Governor of Burgundy. Royalty itself lived hardly more in public than these great officials, and royalty was a little less at the mercy of observant eyes and chattering tongues.

"For those who are not the slaves of the Court it is possible even at Court to adore their Lord and serve Him devoutly," so at a later stage S. François wrote.[1] And again after a longer interval: "Persevere in that magnificence of courage which keeps you on a level above temporal things." This last was in 1616,[2] when perseverance had endured almost three years, and the miracle of a holy life in the midst of conditions not encouraging to holiness seemed within range of possibility. Personal intercourse must

[1] *Œuvres*, XVI. 997, p. 223. [2] *Ibid.* XVII. 1156, p. 129.

have been very infrequent, however, and to director and penitent alike the pressure of affairs hindered intimate converse by letter. When S. François expresses regret for his shortcomings in the matter of written direction he does not couple it with apology for questions left unanswered. The needs and desires of the châtelaine of some lonely castle in Savoy, or of the city dame struggling to adjust devout practice with the claims of marital authority, expressed themselves in outpourings on paper for despatch to Annecy, and evoked replies that have held inspiration for lonely and harassed souls in many climes through many centuries. Presumably the Governor of Burgundy had as many difficulties in spiritual advance as humbler persons, but these were not set forth in writing and so the suggestions made to him were not elaborated.

It became the habit of François de Sales, after the two books that contained the essence of his teaching had been published, to indicate special passages in them that applied to the questions of his correspondents. To M. de Bellegarde, whose conversion had been upheld by the "Introduction to Devout Life," he sent the "Treatise on the Love of God," fresh from the printer's hands, counselling him to read it from beginning to end, and regard the chapters as letters to himself from the author, if he had any desire for such letters.

The "Treatise" is not designed for beginners; its recommendation to the Duke may be accepted as a sign that he had made forward strides since "the tenth of an hour morning and evening" was assumed to be sufficient for his devotional practice. It may be, on the other hand, that S. François, finding himself without definite knowledge of his progress or retrogression, gave freely of that which he believed to be his best, in faith that the prayers supplementing his random shots would make them of service in the long battle begun that summer evening at Saint-Claude. And if communication was rare the spiritual relation of father and son continued to the end. Moreover, after an illness in 1618 that brought Bellegarde to the threshold of death, S. François was sure enough of him to be able to write in such terms as these [1]: "If until now you have intended to

[1] *Œuvres*, XVIII. 1446, p. 245.

dedicate the present moments to immortality and the eternal future, you will now redouble your resolve, taking stock of days and hours and using them eagerly for your own advancement in the love of God and to increase devout living among dwellers in the world, in short for the practice of those noble virtues which by the grace of God and your native goodness you have cherished and desired for so long."

Truly this demand is a notable advance on the suggestions of five years earlier. The Visitation nun who took stock of days and hours and used them all for advance in the love of God was far on the way to fulfilling her vocation; and a courtier whose feet were planted on the same level (if there were any such) had attained a height not far from sanctity. Probably S. François had allowed his hopes to soar a little too freely. The alteration of the standard that he sets between 1613 and 1618 may be a result of a different outlook in himself rather than in his penitent, for if in 1618 his vision of God's Kingdom had become constant, and he saw the world with the eyes of the contemplative, it would have made him loth to acquiesce in any practice of half-measures by one dear to him. Anxiety at his friends' danger quickened affection, and perhaps he pictured Bellegarde, like another Ange de Joyeuse, repudiating wealth and high estate to wed with Lady Poverty.

Actually Bellegarde was not of such fibre as makes the hermit or the monk, and after the death of François de Sales his fervour showed sensible abatement. Mme. de Motteville [1] accords him the unenviable distinction of being the veteran among the admirers of Anne of Austria, and, though that folly may have been entirely innocent, it does not accord with the precepts instilled by the "Introduction to Devout Life." It is satisfactory to know, however, that in his case, as in that of Celse-Bénigne de Chantal, the final scenes agreed with the standards S. François inculcated, for in his last years he showed profound devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, and when he died, in 1642, his death was accounted holy by those who witnessed it.

[1] *Mémoires*, Vol. I. p. 15.

CHAPTER V

The Favoured Daughter

The method adopted by François de Sales in his approach to M. de Bellegarde is especially interesting when we compare it with his direction of Mme. Brulart and others like-minded. With Bellegarde as with Celse-Bénigne the emphasis is laid on regular Communion ; he was to " beguile his soul " with a deception as to the passing of the year, that the pledge given for that period might keep continuous hold upon him, and it is plain in the case of Bellegarde that his example is regarded as of value. In Mme. Brulart the desire for frequent Communion had to be restrained and there were possibilities that the frequency of her approach might be a cause of stumbling to her neighbour. The contrast is remarkable and it shows us, besides the difference in fervour between the two, the immense gulf dividing the standards of conduct required of men and of women. Bellegarde, by his approach to the Altar, which showed that he made choice of righteousness, served as a beacon ; Mme. Brulart, under the observation of her friends, must restrain censoriousness and discontent, lest she should deter others from devout practice by the imperfection so visible in herself.

If we conclude that women of the generation that knew François de Sales were subject to many follies, we must admit also that a great deal was expected from them, and they needed fortitude as well as active virtues. Some there were who, in the midst of rich and dignified surroundings, had to endure domestic tyranny from which there was no escape ; while others faced constant torments of anxiety as to the safety of those they loved. The machinery of life in those days does not seem to have been constructed with much

regard for their contentment, and the woes which won sympathy from François de Sales were part of conditions generally accepted. He had intuition for the pain that wins no condolence and yet may imply as sharp a test as the bereavement calling for general compassion; and his sympathy was part of his endeavour to show how individual griefs must find their true proportion in a world full of suffering.

Humanly he had, as the phrase goes, "no time to spare," yet we find him repeatedly expressing a wish for long and detailed letters and even remonstrating at an apology for length. Sometimes, indeed, he seems to foreshadow certain theories of the twentieth century when he encourages free expression even of trivial miseries. This, in one who by nature craved persistently for leisure to fulfil his own vocation as a writer, manifests a degree of charity altogether above nature; and as we regard it and realise the self-conquest that it indicates we realise also how it came about that the Bishop of Geneva, honoured by the Pope and the King of France and by so many of the greatest folk of many nations, was the friend and confidant of the poor and the timid and the despised wherever they came within his reach. And if at first it was by deliberate endeavour that he concentrated on each individual with whom he came in spiritual contact, ere long effort turned into habit and the sharing of joy and sorrow was spontaneous. In the words with which he concluded a letter of condolence: "In short, my daughter, believe that you have my sympathy; it seems to me that when you suffer I suffer with you."

And here his profound belief in the usefulness of suffering should be noted. He commended all reasonable efforts after recovery from sickness without abandoning the view that a Christian called to the endurance of bodily pain is privileged. A nun who wrote that she had appealed to Our Lord by His Crown of Thorns to deliver her from a headache startled him into more emphatic remonstrance than ordinarily he allowed himself. "For my part," he answered her,[1] "I should not dare to ask Our Lord in remembrance of the injuries to His head to relieve me of

[1] *Œuvres*, XVII. 1277, p. 340.

the pains in mine. Did He suffer that we should have no suffering? St. Catherine of Siena beheld her Saviour offering her two crowns, one of gold, the other of thorns. 'O! for this world I choose pain,' she told Him, 'the other will be for Heaven!' I would rather appeal to that crowning of Our Lord to obtain a crown of patience for my aching head."

"He paid very little heed to what he suffered," said Ste. Chantal,[1] "and welcomed pain for the love of Our Lord. . . . He said one could serve God more perfectly by suffering than by doing, and that Our Lord did more to save us, if such a phrase is possible, by what He suffered than by what He did."

It is easy to see the profound consolation of that doctrine for women to whom advancing years brought ill-health and consequent inactivity. And for these François de Sales had a special message. They were often very important, for the life of the family was the recognised basis of the social fabric, and the wife and mother was the centre of the home. Only, according to ordinary standards, the wife and mother whose unblemished record earned general respect and who had practised her religion faithfully throughout her long life, was too advanced in virtue to need conversion, and it required the charity of S. François to find subject for solicitude in her spiritual state. For it was his charity that refused to be satisfied with respectability and saw the makings of a saint wherever he found real devotion to Our Lord. And so determined was he to bring to light the highest quality in every character that the habits and prejudices of middle-age were no defence against the vigour of his attack.

Louise de Charmoisy and Marie Brulart were young wives when first he had knowledge of them, and many of those he directed were known to him from childhood. With such as these his influence had been a compelling force, and yet the nature for which he had perhaps the most complete comprehension and from which he received the most perfect response was fixed and matured by the passing of the years before he touched it. Madeleine de la Forrest,

[1] *Œuvres de Ste. Chantal*, iii. 166.

wife of Claude François de la Flechère, had married late in life, and her husband, who held office in the Household of Nemours, was a spendthrift and a duellist.[1] Her devotion to him, while it enriched her character, did not lighten the burden of her anxieties, and there are some indications that, in the Lent when François de Sales came to Rumilly, she was becoming more and more possessed by a spirit of bitterness. Mme. de la Flechère was forty-five years old; her husband had a fine house in Rumilly, and she was an important person in a very small place and so well known for a lifetime of devout practice that she could not desist from observance without arousing comment. She had heard many Lent preachings, for even in very small towns preachers were invited at long notice. Usually the Lent messenger came from a preaching Order, and if the choice had been fortunate his zeal and eloquence might stir expectant souls. And then he would go away, and leave the fostering of his work to others, and a year later the process would be repeated.

Perhaps by the year 1608 Madeleine de la Flechère had ceased to look forward to the approach of Lent with any exalted anticipation of its effect upon herself. And then the tidings came that the Bishop himself would preach. Annecy and La Roche had already had this privilege. It meant that those who knew him only by sight and name might hear him talk as a father to his children, might have personal access to him if they wished, and ever after would feel a new relation to one who was rarely removed completely from their reach. Rumilly, only nine miles from Annecy, might have appeared too insignificant for such a privilege, but the preacher found in it all he could desire. He said[2] he was more at ease there and more in sympathy with his hearers than he had ever been in Paris, and was freed from all temptations to vanity. The people flocked to hear him and he "talked to them tenderly of God and of our duty towards Him."[3]

We know then that he found great response at Rumilly and was allowed to bring new life to many souls, and there

[1] Chaugy, *Vies des VIII Vénérables Veuves*, No. II.
[2] *Année Sainte*, ii, p. 672. [3] *Œuvres*, XIII. 436, p. 377, *note*.

was one—as there had been in Dijon and as there was to be in Grenoble and in Paris—for whom he had been entrusted with a special summons. Madeleine de la Flechère—already elderly according to the standards of that time—and notably pious by reputation, might not have appeared to be in need of spiritual help to eyes less penetrating than those of François de Sales. It had been easy to recognise Mme. de Chantal at Dijon as standing aloof from her surroundings; the case of Mme. de la Flechère required keener observation, for she had no gifts that arrest notice nor was there anything in her position to redeem it from the dullness of provincial life. Yet S. François coupled these two together. After eight years' close knowledge of her he wrote of Mme. de la Flechère [1] that, except Mme. de Chantal, he had never found a braver spirit in a woman, or such firm reason, or such true humility. To have so perfect a sheep within his fold, he said, made it worth while to be Shepherd of his ill-fated diocese.

Society in Savoy was bound together by ties of kinship. Claude de Charmoisy, husband of Philothée, was first cousin to Claude de la Flechère, husband of this new ally, and admission for her into the favoured circle of the Bishop's friends followed on their meeting at Rumilly. The dire peril that hung over her husband's life, while he remained at Court, may not have been realised by those who came in touch with Mme. de la Flechère in the quiet occupations of her home. The anxiety overshadowing her days had to be borne in secret, yet in those days of duelling she could never be secure that he might not meet his end in the midst of deadly sin; and her fears were only laid to rest by the sudden illness of which he actually died. A heavy price to pay for peace of mind.

Throughout her sufferings were those of a loving heart, but nerve and temper were not less taxed because love prompted her terrors and her grief, and the spirit of surrender required by S. François could be achieved only by long and patient struggle. We have seen that for his chosen ones he welcomed suffering in whatever form it came. He wished for them the keen sense of joy and sorrow

[1] *Œuvres*, XVII. 1164, p. 143.

that he himself possessed: "I have no liking," he wrote, "for such natures as care for nothing and remain unmoved by all events . . . but those whose indifference is entire resignation to the will of God have indeed reason to give thanks to His Divine Majesty, for they possess a great gift."

Entire resignation supposes the possession of something to resign, and the Visitation nun, as she learnt to ask nothing and to refuse nothing, did not strive to kill the capacity for desire which God had given her. Instead she offered it, and all the zeal and enthusiasm that were a part of it, with the hourly offering of her will. From dwellers in the world S. François required the same sort of discrimination. It was always much harder to consecrate the accustomed way of life than to condemn it and turn to something new, and this was hardest of all perhaps for a devout soul such as Madeleine de la Flechère, to whom the years had brought discouragement and weariness.

"Do what you have to do as perfectly as you can," S. François said to her,[1] "but when you have finished don't think of it any more. Follow after Our Lord quite simply and don't be disturbed in spirit. We should hate our faults, but with a calm and settled hatred, not fiercely and feverishly; moreover, we must regard them patiently and use them as a means of real self-abasement. It is because you fail in this, my daughter, that your imperfections, which you detect with such subtlety, are still more subtle in disturbing you and hold their ground because they do so, for there is no better way to encourage weaknesses than to be anxious and worried about conquering them."

Evidently she was scrupulous, critical of herself and others, disposed to worry and to go back on points already answered. She had, in short, the disagreeable defects that often afflict very good persons, and François de Sales had time enough, during his Lenten sojourn, to recognise them, even as he must have recognised the deep and steady goodness that lay behind them. She had been very fervent in her youth,[2] and the fire of his faith rekindled the embers

[1] *Œuvres*, XIV. 512, p. 120.

[2] Chaugy, *Vies des VIII Vénérables Veuves*, pp. 125–127.

from the past. Yet when the weeks of wonder had gone by we may picture her in her husband's house at Rumilly, facing the old routine with a sinking fear lest her new joy should die under the stress of monotony and solitude. And it might well have been that she, who had been privileged from childhood, would not have made particular appeal to one whose task was to convert the ignorant and reclaim the sinners of his flock. In her case, however, as in that of Mme. de Charmoisy, the Bishop seems to have invited correspondence, and soon after his return to Annecy he wrote to her at length. This inaugurated a series of letters which contains some of his wisest teaching.

"I have received your first letter with particular satisfaction," he wrote,[1] "as a good beginning to the spiritual intercourse between us that is to advance the Kingdom of God in our hearts. May God Himself show me the best way of guiding you. It is not possible for you to have control of your will so soon or that you should get an absolute hold on yourself at the first start. Be satisfied if from time to time you win some little victory over your besetting sin. We must bear with other people, but still more must we bear with ourselves and have patience with our own failures. How can we expect to achieve inward tranquillity without passing through the usual struggles and contradictions?

"Be very particular on those points that I gave you. From early morning dispose your soul to quietness; all day long take special care to bring it back to this and to have it well in hand. If any mishap occurs don't be alarmed and don't be very much disturbed; only, having realised it, humble yourself meekly before God and try to compose your mind. Say to your soul: Well! well! we have stumbled! let us go forward and take better care! And always and whenever you fall do the same thing. When you have a period of peace make good use of it, doing as many acts of kindness as you can on every occasion you find, however small they may be; for as Our Lord tells us, he that is faithful in little things shall be entrusted with great things. Above all, my daughter, never lose courage,

[1] *Œuvres*, XIV. 444, p. 1.

be patient, wait, and make constant use of the spirit of compassion. I am quite certain that the Hand of God is holding you, and when He lets you stumble it is only to show you that without His hold you would fall altogether, and that you may grasp His Hand more firmly."

It is clear that François de Sales regarded his new charge as one already well advanced on the way of the devout life, for he recommends her at once to reserve an hour in the morning for meditation besides beginning and ending every day with prayer. And " during the day and in the midst of business as often as you can, see that you are not allowing desire to grow fixed, that you are not going in a wrong direction, see whether you are holding on to Our Lord with one hand all the time. If you find yourself worried beyond bearing, steady your soul and be at peace again. Picture how Our Lady made quiet use of one hand while she kept hold of Our Lord with the other or held Him on her arm in His childhood ; for she was very careful over this. Don't waste your time opposing little temptations that come to you by fighting them or thinking about them, instead turn your heart simply to Jesus Crucified, as though in love you sought to kiss His Feet or His Side. Do not force yourself to accomplish a great deal of vocal prayer, and always if you find yourself drawn, when praying, towards meditation yield yourself at once ; if besides meditation you say only the Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary and the Creed you may rest content." [1]

This is not the counsel he would address to a novice, and indeed there was good reason that the discovery of Madeleine de la Flechère should have been classed in the mind of S. François with the discovery made at Dijon four years earlier. He found in her, as he had found in Jeanne de Chantal, great powers already cultivated and developed, but in need of pruning and directing along simpler lines than those towards which they tended. And from the beginning he numbered her among those from whom he asked much. When he encouraged her to write to him freely—even a catalogue of woes—he did so that he might

[1] *Œuvres*, XIV. 448, p. 7.

show her how to offer up her will with joy instead of enduring with reluctance.

"In truth, my dear daughter," he wrote to her,[1] "the surest way to tranquillity in this world is to look very often at Our Lord in all the affliction that fell upon Him between birth and death; for we shall see so much suspicion and calumny, such poverty and privation, such shame, such weariness, torment, nakedness, scorn, and bitterness in every form, that by comparison we shall learn the folly of regarding the little mischances that befall us as afflictions and also our mistake in seeking patience for such a very small matter, when one little drop of humility would be sufficient to reconcile us to what happens.

"I know your spiritual state so well that it seems always to be clear before my eyes, with all its little inclinations to despondency and shrinking and anxiety that tend to continual disturbance, because your will is not yet fixed firmly enough in love of the Cross and of humiliation. My very dear daughter, a heart which holds real love and devotion for Jesus Christ Crucified loves His death, His suffering, His torment, His contumely, His poverty, His hunger, His thirst, His ignominy, and when a chance appears of any little share in all this it grasps at it eagerly and is full of rejoicing. You must make it your daily habit, therefore, not in time of prayer but separately when you are out of doors, to picture Our Lord in His suffering for our redemption and consider how great a privilege it would be to have any share in it, and what possibilities there are of the privilege being yours. By which I mean you should consider the likelihood of every desire you have being denied, and very particularly those desires which seem to you the highest and best, and then, full of eager love for the Cross and Passion of Our Lord, you must exclaim, as S. Andrew did: 'O sweet Cross, so beloved by my Saviour, when will your arms receive me?' You see, my very dear daughter, we are far too ready to give the name of poverty to a state in which we do not suffer either hunger, or cold, or contempt, but merely a few little hindrances to our plans. When we meet again remind me to talk about this shrinking and

[1] *Œuvres*, XIV. 562, p. 232.

apprehensiveness of yours, for you need above all else to correct it if you are to have any peace and really to give yourself to the consideration of eternity. He whose thoughts are often turned in that direction will not trouble himself greatly about the happenings of our three or four moments of mortal life."

S. François did not spare those in whom he descried the highest order of capacity, and his demand on Madeleine de la Flechère was severe. She evoked some of the most valuable of his letters to her when she pleaded bodily weakness and fatigue as an excuse for spiritual indifference. He told her then that physical distress furnished the most useful of opportunities, and quoted Angela of Foligno and her statement that Our Lord preferred the service we force ourselves to render—" which a resolute will offers, despite the feebleness of the flesh and the revolt of our lower nature, from the midst of dryness and suffering and interior desolation." [1] " Sweetness and softness and the joy of spiritual consolation may be pleasing, yet bitterness and dryness produce more fruit. Although S. Peter loved Mount Thabor and fled from Calvary it is Calvary that signified most, and the blood shed on the one has accomplished more than all the radiance beaming from the other. Already Our Lord has trust in your courage; make a little attempt to respond. Better eat bread and no sugar than sugar and no bread." [2]

The time came when his letters to her ceased to be letters of direction. He helped her in business matters and over the guidance of her son when she was left a widow; their friendship strengthened as the years passed; and in the last of his letters to her, written in the autumn before his death, he assures her as he ends that he " is ever more and more her very humble ally and servant." [3] Years of patience had been required, however, before he could feel that she was independent of his supporting hand, and many lessons had to be repeated over and over again. She had definite failings that were hard to overcome; she inclined to ill-temper and impatience and discontent, and it took a long time to break through habit. Also when she gave way to

[1] *Œuvres*, XIV. 468, p. 52.
[2] *Ibid.* 564, p. 236.
[3] *Ibid.* XX. 1941, p. 364.

these errors her distress passed all reasonable limit and she had to be assured that, by the mercy of God, sin equal to hers was constantly forgiven. "Put away fear and leave off teasing your poor conscience," S. François urged her,[1] and he showed her that vanity lurked behind the teasing. She wanted to be assured of her own advance, whereas all that really concerned her was that she should go on in faith: if she did well giving God the praise, if she stumbled humbling herself.

As we follow the series of the letters to her we find that her faults and failures did not prevent her from being a beacon that drew and guided others. Despite bodily weakness and the burden of advancing years her ardour for the Faith glowed so intensely that it could not be ignored. In this she stands beside Ste. Chantal; and indeed these two, though the paths they followed and the difficulties besetting them differed widely, had much experience in common. Many of the lessons set by S. François for Madeleine de la Flechère are the same as those intended for Ste. Chantal. The more they gave, the more he asked; leading them step by step, until at length he was able to disclose to them the nature of self-love and they found themselves to be the merest novices in the practice of surrender.

And perhaps for Madeleine de la Flechère no less than for Ste. Chantal the lesson could not be fully learnt until the teacher was out of human sight and hearing. Cares and anxieties dragged heavily upon them both. The widow of Claude de la Flechère had to deal with a legacy of lawsuits, and the Mother-Foundress had very little rest from the attacks of a world to which the purpose and the ideal of the Visitation were wholly alien. We know from the Letters of Ste. Chantal that the great secret of S. François' life had been imparted to her, and she achieved the peace that outward commotion cannot move. Of Madeleine de la Flechère, in the ten years that remained to her, we learn something also from these Letters.[2] She was the adviser to whom the Superiors of the Visitation at Rumilly were sent in their difficulties of government; she bestowed upon them the house where she had lived her married life and where

[1] *Œuvres*, XVI. 912, p. 68. [2] *Œuvres de Ste. Chantal*, v.

François de Sales had been her guest; and as time passed she drew nearer and nearer to them, being imbued with the spirit of surrender which was theirs. At length, in her last illness, they accorded to her the privilege reserved for those who were completely faithful and she died as a Sister of the Visitation.

CHAPTER VI

A Rare Nature

The people of Savoy had reason to be grateful for the tyrannical disposition of their sovereign, for they owed it to his interference that their Bishop so rarely travelled beyond the limits of his diocese, and thus as the years passed was able to achieve an intimacy with his flock that bore fruit in many conversions.

The sordid side of life, lawsuits, protracted quarrels, money anxieties, were apt, in the diocese of Geneva as in other places, to engross the mental horizon and dim the instinct for prayer. Men and women in cottages and castles needed a human voice to convince them that their clutch on this world's prizes was not worthy to absorb all their solicitude. The Bishop found a welcome in the huts of shepherds and farm labourers, and makes frequent reference to the sayings and doings of working folk, and, if the capacity to read and write had been more general, his peasant friends would certainly have been numbered among his correspondents. It is because the written word would have conveyed nothing to them that we have less knowledge of their individual distresses than in the case of their richer neighbours. And in dealing with the land-owning class in Savoy he found his way smoothed by his familiarity with the surroundings of their life. Up and down through his great diocese there were scattered so many country houses of the same type as his own home at Thorens; and he knew very well that broad acres and stately homes were of no avail to those who were in quest of the Peace of God. It was to that quest that many souls were inspired by their contact with him. Whether the general trend of fortune had been prosperous or not, with middle life the cares and frettings

of the world had weakened resolution or withered hope; and then a chance encounter with one who saw these things from a level not achieved by average humanity would bring back old visions, and with them cravings for peace not yet experienced.

Sometimes the shining of clear light followed on that breaking of the clouds. The charity of François de Sales was so immense that it swept away many of the ordinary hindrances to communication, and the difficulty or sin or sorrow that had grown to vast proportions in lonely musings lost its terrors when it was brought to him. Life might be very solitary in those stately castles of Savoy, but the closely written sheets that came from the Bishop's house at Annecy had a special meaning and delight for those who could read and ponder them, when social pleasures and intercourse were out of reach. Truly the people of Savoy were privileged, and not a few used their privilege to good advantage. Yet in proportion as the way for them was clear their spiritual pilgrimage is the less worthy of record. A conversion which bore full testimony to the force of the supernatural was one achieved against the influence of environment and tradition, and triumphs of this kind became more and more rare in Savoy, where all persons, unless they were of malicious or criminal intent, joined in the veneration accorded to the Bishop. It was in Lyons, and later on in Paris, that when he beckoned to one and another who watched him doubtfully or even with defiance, some compelling power in his gesture secured response.

Among such figures as they emerge from the pages of the Correspondence, there is not one more appealing than that of Ennemonde Le Blanc de Mions. She was the wife of Pierre Le Blanc de Mions, a magistrate first in Lyons and afterwards in Grenoble, whose conduct seems to have given her some excuse for the lively detestation with which she regarded him. As home offered no happiness she claimed the right to snatch as much enjoyment as might be from the world, and so was well known to society in Lyons. And then Mme. de Chantal came to found the first Branch House of her Order, and momentarily the new Visitation was the fashion; and the discriminating glance of the Mother

Superior fell on Madame la Presidente Le Blanc and marked her as worthy of some better way of life than that which she had chosen. In due course the Bishop of Geneva made a brief stay in Lyons. He reached many souls among the multitude in that great city at various times, but of this one we know with very special certainty, and with her, his experience of the world in which she lived—the social world of the *noblesse de la robe*—proved of infinite service.

In his preface to the " Devout Life," already quoted, we see his vision of the possibilities in reach of " a vigorous and constant soul " living in the midst of the world, and his very great desire to set forth these possibilities that they might be widely realised. No doubt he remained on the alert for the right subjects, even after his book had spread his suggestions broadcast among the faithful, and he perceived in Mme. Le Blanc the quality for which he was in search. His approach to her was the easier because he recognised that the desire for the life of the spirit must be implanted before there can be true rejection of delight in the world, and so he was more concerned to infuse new longings than to denounce the old.

Ennemonde Le Blanc had regarded small social excitements as the best safeguard against despair, for her religion offered no resource until François de Sales showed it in a new aspect. Thus she may be numbered among those awakened by his touch, and she never faltered in the intention of self-offering. At Lyons, and afterwards and more particularly at Grenoble, she used the social gifts and personal fascination that had made her a leading figure among the idle rich to draw her equals and associates within range of the influence that had changed her life. The lasting effect of the teaching of François de Sales in Grenoble may have owed something to her vigorous propaganda, and she was largely responsible for the movement that claimed an establishment of the Visitation within the city walls,[1] for she had power to infect others with her own enthusiasm.

It was because of the disaster in her life, however, that François de Sales lavished his care on her. Her claim on him owed nothing to the record of her benefits to the new Order.

[1] Servonnet, P., *S. François de Sales à Grenoble*, p. 49.

Two years after they met at Lyons he saw her briefly at the close of his Lent course at Grenoble, and wrote a letter on his return to Annecy, which sheds vivid light on his relation to her. The letter shows that his sympathy had no weakening element and that he did not hesitate to require obedience on lines that to the natural woman were infinitely difficult.

"How fortunate you are, my dear daughter," [1] he wrote, "to have discovered the worthlessness of the world and its vanities. I am convinced, even in the small opportunity I have had of knowing you, that your heart was very especially intended for heavenly love and not for that which is earthly.

"Make constant surrender, then, to God, of every affection by the renewal of your resolve to have no use for a single moment of your life save for His service. . . . Unless some very pressing occupation prevents, every day must hold time for mental prayer . . . but that this exercise may be adapted to the extraordinary activity of your brain it is enough that you should devote to it a short half-hour or a quarter of an hour; that, with the uplifting of your spirit, with the withdrawal into the Presence of God and the ejaculations of prayer of every hour of the day, are amply sufficient to keep your heart close bound to the Divine Object of its desire. . . . And because you say that while you were at home your mind was too restless and active to be quieted and so you made very little use of mental prayer, I tell you, none the less it must be quieted and its activity gradually lessened until it works gently and calmly under all conditions."

Evidently his correspondent was noted for haste and impatience in the ordinary doings of daily life, and with this weakness he dealt seriously and in detail; for in his view the soul that strove after perfection might give no quarter to such faults as these, and they were to be more readily condemned because of the blacker shadows of temptation hovering near at hand. A Christian wife may not with impunity abhor her husband; and there are many indications that the feeling inspired in his wife by Pierre Le Blanc de Mions did not fall short of abhorrence. She was advised

[1] *Œuvres*, XVII. 1294, p. 367.

to deal with this temptation indirectly by recognising that her distress was part of God's design for her and surrendering to His Will. "We must remain on the vessel in which we have embarked for the voyage from this life to the other, and we must remain readily and cheerfully; even though we may perhaps have gone on board under the guidance of man and not of God, nevertheless when once we have embarked it is God's Will we should remain. . . . The less heed we pay to our own choice the nearer we are to submission to the Heavenly Will. . . . And, my dear daughter, it is essential that you should sometimes approach those whom you wot of whom you regard with such aversion; and when you speak to the chief among these you should sometimes soften your remonstrances with expressions of respect. I think this point so essential for the perfecting of your soul that I would gladly write it with my blood.

"And in what way should we wish to bear witness to our love for Him, Who suffered so much for us, if we will not do it in defiance of dislike and antagonism and opposition? We must thrust our head among the thorns of difficulty and let our heart be pierced by the spear of contradiction; we must drink the gall and vinegar since it is God Who will have it so. In short, my dear daughter, just as hitherto you courted and indulged the opposite temptation with your whole heart, so now with your whole heart you must court and encourage self-surrender. And if any very grave difficulty should arise by the behaviour of a certain person, take no action till you can fix your gaze upon eternity, till you have achieved indifference, and can take the advice of some wise servant of God if the necessity is immediate; or if there be time, as I am your Spiritual Father, consult me."

We have seen already that those who accepted the guidance of François de Sales were not necessarily required to eschew all outward vanities, and if the use of paint and powder were the rule in the circle to which they belonged he did not prohibit it; and he could pass on from urging the practice of "most holy humility" to counsel due regard for dress and outward appearance. He considered that the devotion advertised by ill-fitting gowns hindered the cause of religion, and it was the part of Mme. Le Blanc de Mions

to attract the young and worldly by her personal charm and gradually to enlist them in the company of the faithful. So in such external matters her director made no severe demand on her obedience, but he asked a form of self-conquest that was much more difficult. When every thought must be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ there is no interlude for justified resentment; and even remonstrances must be tempered with expressions of respect. This "dear daughter" of his accepted his direction unreservedly, and because acceptance implied an endeavour towards self-oblation she became very swiftly a witness to the power of the faith that possessed her.

S. François, writing to her, for sake of safety, as if his direction was to be passed on to an imaginary "Barbe Marie," bade her "speak freely about God wherever there is any likelihood that it is useful to do so, in complete indifference with regard to what may be said or thought about her by those who listen. Briefly, as I have told her before, she should never say or do anything to win admiration. And to preach something higher than one's own practice is not to be a hypocrite. God forbid! Where would that land us all? I should have to hold my tongue to avoid hypocrisy because it would mean that if I spoke of perfection I was assuming to be perfect. Truly no, my dear daughter, it does not follow that I am myself perfect because I speak of perfection any more than it follows I am a native of Italy because I speak Italian; it only means that I have learnt the phraseology of perfection from associating with someone who already knew it." [1]

Possibly there was not one among his spiritual children who owed more to S. François than did Mme. Le Blanc de Mions. Her barque had been near shipwreck before they met, and she journeyed always through stormy seas and beneath clouds that continuously threatened disaster; yet after she had touch with him she feared no longer: despair and revolt gave place to confidence. It is interesting to find her appreciation of deliverance betraying her into the exaggerations which were especially distasteful to her director. He had guided her away from the scruples that

[1] *Œuvres*, XVII. 1301, p. 386.

beset her first gropings towards righteousness and had initiated her into that holy liberty which is the heritage of the children of God. He had shown her that the new law she had accepted gave her far more than it took away from her, and it was only when she slipped into extravagance of expression that she discovered his power in rebuke.

Her error was a common one. She had thanked God for His mercy in drawing her out of blank desolation into light and peace; but the hand to which she clung was human, and she—in the midst of human temptations—had confounded the natural and the supernatural, allowing personal devotion to dominate the scheme of her spiritual life.

The move from Lyons to Grenoble which her husband's office made necessary helped her to set daily activities in a different framework, but the change in the interior spirit was a matter of gradual growth, coinciding with an emergence from unhappiness bordering on despair. S. François found her ready for new revelation; she told him of her resolve to dedicate every moment of her life to God's service, and he confirmed her in it. His belief in her transformed uncertain hope into firm purpose; she found herself a fellow-labourer with those who formerly had seemed to move in a world to which she had no access, and where once the hours had dragged miserably along they now appeared too short for all her need of them. When she looked back over the years, and saw the change as from darkness into light, marking the stages that began with that first meeting in the Visitation parlour at Lyons,—what wonder if that eager heart and vivid brain esteemed the human agent of God's gift to her as something more than human? Her distress when S. François, after preaching for the last time in Grenoble, had returned to Annecy, did not stop short of anguish, and her manner of expressing it seems to have accorded with her natural self and not with the new being, formed on the Visitation theory of surrender.

The manner in which S. François met extravagance of this kind is worthy of record.

"Very dear daughter of my heart," he wrote,[1] "you must know that a daughter of mine tells me that my going

[1] *Œuvres*, XVIII. 1416, p. 197.

has brought anguish upon her, that unless she stops her eyes they would shed as many tears as the drops that fall from the sky, to mourn my departure—with other fine phrases. But she does not stop there, for she says I am not a man but something divine sent to win love and admiration, and, which signifies still more, she says she would go much further if she dared.

"What have you to say—my very dear daughter? Does it not seem to you that it is wrong to talk like this? Are not these extravagant phrases? There is no possible excuse except for the love she bears me which is certainly altogether holy but is expressed in terms of the world. Now tell her, my very dear daughter, that she must never attribute what is divine to wretched human creatures in any manner whatsoever, and to imagine the possibility of going further still in praise shows a disordered imagination, and to express it is disorderly speech; that vanity in words is far more to be avoided than vanity in hairdressing and adornment, that henceforward she is to be simple in speech, not curled and powdered. You must however say it to her so gently, sweetly and reverently that she will welcome a rebuke from a heart that, as you know, cherishes her with love more than fatherly as a daughter very dear to my heart, and one I can trust entirely.

"Let God be the object of our love always, and live in Him and for Him eternally. Amen."

Knowing himself as merely the steward of God's mercies, François de Sales was able to accept with simplicity tokens of homage and admiration that were peculiarly offensive to his taste. The intention behind these manifestations had got twisted, yet at root he knew it to be one of generosity, and by grace it could be restored to worthier lines of growth. So there is no hint of impatience in his rebuke of folly, only in one form or another it carries with it the counsel that must annihilate all false and exaggerated sentiment: "Let God be the object of our love always—let us live in Him and for Him eternally."

And Mme. Le Blanc de Mions took her lesson and laid it to heart, for she was worthy to be one whom he could "trust entirely," and he can never have found a response

to his summons more vigorous or more complete. He touched her first (and by human calculation very lightly) in 1615; fuller intercourse came two years later; and at intervals, as he spent periods at Grenoble, he had close association with her. Then in 1618 came the break that meant such poignant anguish, and in May 1619 his letter to the Visitation at Grenoble contains these lines: "So my very dear daughter, Madame la Presidente Le Blanc, is no longer with you, rather I believe she is with the angels. Truly hers was a rare nature. Grenoble loses a rare example of virtue in losing her." [1]

He taught her to use the discipline of life, for the ugliness of her experience at home was never veiled and the miracle of grace was needed to tame the violence of her revolt against her lot. She may be accounted fortunate, however, for the training of adversity prepared her to understand the message of S. François, and in four years she learnt the lesson that can occupy a lifetime.

[1] *Œuvres*, XVIII. 1516, p. 374.

CHAPTER VII

The Discipline of Family Life

When S. François declared it to be his " intention to instruct those who are obliged to lead an ordinary life in outward show " [1] he did not pledge himself to avoid the teaching that would serve as a guide towards complete withdrawal. He might veil his vision of the spiritual life, he could not lower it; and the effort to adhere closely to his teaching, and to see with his eyes, sometimes transformed the soul of good intention and moderate practice into " the slave of God."

Under his direction we shall find some persons fixed in the world who seem to have been more fitted for Religion, others with Religion as the goal of their legitimate desire whose discipline it was to remain upon the threshold; and others again for whom the call of Religion implied the supreme contradiction of desire. For the first type, those fixed in the world, he had smiling commiseration. Of one of them, of whom he had special knowledge, Andrée de la Valbonne, daughter-in-law of President Favre, he wrote [2] to Jacqueline Favre, the Visitation nun: " It was lucky for your brother that he found and won her before she knew of our little Congregation, for otherwise she would have been your sister and not your sister-in-law. God will guide her along this road on which He has set her, however, to some real achievement of perfection, as her desire is so strong."

Mme. de la Valbonne lived at Chambéry and, despite the devout tradition of her husband's family, her desire for close communication with Annecy was continually thwarted. François de Sales, after observation of the methods of M. de la Valbonne, remarked " That truly is a household where the

[1] See *Int. à la Vie Dévote*, Preface. [2] *Œuvres*, XV. 758, p. 180.

Rule of Obedience is in force!" [1] And when a domestic crisis occurred it did not find him unprepared. René de la Valbonne ventured on territory ordinarily held to be sacred from interference; he brought influence to bear on his wife's confessor and so prevailed with him that the privilege of frequent Communion, extended to her by François de Sales, was withdrawn.

The overworked Bishop, sitting at his desk in the Hôtel Favre at Annecy, might have been justified had he decided that he could not deal with so delicate a situation from a distance and had written a few non-committal sentences in reply to the appeal of Mme. de la Valbonne. Instead, her distress, outwardly so unimportant and inwardly so bitter, became his own. On the one hand he measures the full weight of the burden, on the other he measures how best it may be borne by one who is the slave of God.

"There is no alternative, my dear daughter," he wrote [2]; "we who have given up worldly satisfactions may not rest in that, we must also give up those that are spiritual, since this is the will of Him for Whom we are pledged to live and die.

"You may imagine whether the Mother would have made great rejoicing over the sight of you at the Visitation and whether I should have found joy in your consolation! . . . But since husband and Confessor are against it you must resign yourself over this as also over the reduction of your Communions. I do not know their reasons for this, and not knowing them I can say no more. Perhaps they equally do not know mine and so do not regard them as worthy of attention. In such matters each one has his own point of view; but for you yourself I do assure you that you will not be at any loss, for what you lose in the sweetness of Communion will be restored through the humility of your submission if you yield simply to their requirements.

"But as concerns their warning that frequent Communion may be detrimental to you I think you need not trouble yourself about that, nor do I think it was founded on any revelation of your spiritual state but was given to

[1] *Œuvres*, XVII. 1274, p. 336. [2] *Ibid.* XVIII. 1309, p. 3.

mortify you, or perhaps merely by way of excuse, because it does happen sometimes that even very wise people do not see things quite as they are.

"At any rate when Madame la Presidente [1] comes we shall see how things really stand."

No one could have denied that Mme. de la Valbonne had a legitimate grievance against her husband, and nature must have rebelled when François de Sales presented it to her under the semblance of a privilege. He knew her capacity for response, however, and he dared to ask much of her. This cause of offence, against which her being had risen in revolt, belonged to the natural circumstances of her life and so must be accepted as the thing "most profitable to her soul and most pleasing to God." [2] And he recognised, as he once wrote to her, that God overruled all other interests in her heart.[3]

We have no record of her eventual achievement because, just when she had accepted deprivation of the privileges she most desired, they were accorded to her in fullest measure. It was in May 1617 that she wrote her most despairing protest from Chambéry to her friend and director; and four months later her husband accepted an appointment that necessitated residence in Annecy.[4] An apartment in the great Hôtel Favre was set aside for his household, and in January 1618 Mme. de la Valbonne found herself installed in a home that gave her constant opportunity of the spiritual association she coveted. Perhaps she felt her good fortune too great for one who aspired to entire surrender; certainly it entailed a penalty of poignant sorrow. If fate had kept her at Chambéry she would have mourned, as many another mourned, over the death of François de Sales. It was on those who dwelt in Annecy, where all familiar scenes—arcaded streets or glistening canals or the friendly dimness of quiet churches—recalled the beloved presence, that the sense of loss pressed heaviest.

The element of personal affection may be accepted as having larger place in the offer of complete obedience when S. François dealt with dwellers in the world. And if their

[1] Wife of Antoine Favre.
[2] *Int. à la Vie Dévote.*
[3] *Œuvres*, XVIII. 1382, p. 135.
[4] *Ibid.* 1339, p. 57.

purpose was to reach the standard that he set, the matron and the courtier had a harder task than the religious. Certainly they were helped by the warm kindliness with which he met their efforts for self-expression, and the despair of Mme. Le Blanc when he took leave of Grenoble found its echo in the hearts of many who had been permitted to meet him face to face. It was only natures of unusual profundity that could be touched to the same issue without personal contact, and his power of intuition at its highest was needed to unveil the secrets of a soul and guide it through difficult conditions by written word. By his own choice S. François would have refused difficult cases of conscience, especially when they concerned religious vocation, if they had to be dealt with from a distance; and yet we find him, in those later years when his hours were most crowded, dealing with a situation of exceptional complexity connected with the Visitation Convent at Montferrand, without ever having an opportunity of going thither.

The case was that of a young widow, Mme. de Dalet,[1] whose evident desire for Religion had roused the apprehension of her mother, Mme. de Montfan. It was the mother who appealed to Père Coton, once Confessor to Henry IV, and Père Duchesne, a celebrated Oratorian, and they referred her to François de Sales. As the Visitation and its Superior Jacqueline Favre were held responsible by Mme. de Montfan for her disquiet, it was not to the Bishop of Geneva that she would have turned by her own choice. Nevertheless she laid her case before him with such confidence in its justice that she enlisted his sympathy. His first move was to write to la Mère Favre enjoining her to do all she could to incline the daughter towards contenting her mother, giving it as his opinion that Mme. de Dalet was bound to renounce her own satisfaction, even though it depended only on spiritual things, to satisfy her mother.[2]

At first he did not realise the degree of worldliness behind the maternal solicitude of Mme. de Montfan. Without being wholly avaricious this lady had a very clear idea of the duty of a widowed daughter, with ample means at her disposal, towards

[1] Chaugy, *Vies des VIII Vénérables Veuves*, No. VIII.
[2] *Œuvres*, XX. 1777, p. 49.

parents whose state and dignity were upheld by expenditure greatly in excess of their income. She judged rightly that the more Mme. de Dalet identified herself with the spirit of the Visitation the more likely she was to supply temporal needs in connection with it from the funds at her command. And even when Mme. de Montfan announced that she would rather her daughter entered on the Religious Life and abandoned her property, than that she should retain control of it and continue the practice of devotion into which she had been initiated by la Mère Favre, she did not alienate the Bishop's sympathy. His first letter [1] to Mme. de Dalet draws a vivid picture of the insistency of maternal affection and urges the necessity of response. His correspondent appeared to him as one who indulged in the luxuries of piety to the neglect of obvious duties; he writes with his usual gentleness and charm, but this new devotee of the Visitation must have felt with dismay that its Founder had ranged himself with the critics and opponents who were bent on robbing her of all her treasure.

Had she been privileged to read his letter to la Mère Favre, however, she might have taken comfort. "I write to you with my head full of business and surrounded by clamour, and moreover what I write is guess work; for I am well aware that to speak to good effect on this matter demands close personal intercourse with those concerned. But so long as this cannot be one must take the part of the mother: she should always have the benefit of the doubt."

This was written in April 1621. He was then closely occupied with the Diocesan Synod, and he had had very little communication with the person most interested in the controversy. Only by degrees did he gain true knowledge of the position. The letters that concern Mme. de Dalet unfold one of those mysterious dramas of the interior life which are completely inexplicable to minds that reject belief in supernatural guidance. The good things of this world were hers in very full measure, and her parents would not allow that her widowhood justified withdrawal. In fact the chief influence on her life must be traced to François de Sales, for she and her husband had made themselves familiar with

[1] *Œuvres*, XX. 1779, p. 51.

his "Introduction to Devout Life,"[1] and in her case the endeavour to follow his teaching had destroyed all zest for the pleasures natural to her age and condition. She, whose lot had placed her in the world, desired Religion with an ardour as absorbing as human passion; and when, in her turn, she stated her case to the Founder of the Visitation, she convinced him, by force of simplicity, that her desire was no mere caprice to be set aside by parental authority. In the second of his letters to her he admits the impossibility of compromise between her zeal for the practice of devotion and the frank worldliness of Mme. de Montfan.

The next letter addressed to her that has been preserved shows her to be under his spiritual direction and accepted as one of the privileged souls for whom he planned the Visitation. This was written nearly a year later, and by it we are reminded of his own consistent generosity in the giving of time and thought and prayer.

If he had bidden her continue permanently in that state of life to which—in outward seeming—God had called her, she would have obeyed, as Mme. de Montfan was shrewd enough to know. Having reviewed her case, however, he set aside his first impressions and refused to take the safe and obvious way. And here it is worth while to glance for an instant at his attitude towards such questions as this, and to observe that the problem of selection among the claims upon his charity became more and more difficult to solve with every year. He said once: "Sometimes the immense number of the occasions for doing good may be given in place of the cross,"[2] and it is easy to see such opportunity of suffering as we follow him in his experience.

The two women concerned in this dispute were French; they lived outside his diocese and were connected with a Branch House of the Order where technically he held no authority. The disagreement between them had at first seemed easy to adjust by a method that would be approved by all well-disposed persons. A worldly mother asked too much obedience, a pious daughter was too absorbed in her devotions, a little tact and unselfishness on either hand and peace would reign once more! This was his first

[1] *Œuvres*, XX. p. 52, *note*. [2] *Ibid.* XVIII. 1331, p. 49.

pronouncement, and to adhere to it was to keep the door closed against a train of questionings and worries stretching on into the distant future. And he was overloaded with business, assailed on every side by the plaints of necessitous souls, and ever more and more conscious of the great obligation of the sacred office to which he had been consecrated. If he had chosen to leave this young Mme. de Dalet, who was utterly unknown to him, to pursue her search for the way of true obedience without his help he would have exercised only just and reasonable prudence. Already health had begun to fail, and he held a message for his generation that without leisure could not be delivered.

Instead, by his spontaneous invitation Mme. de Dalet was admitted into the group of spiritual children to whom he gave himself so freely. "I beseech you not to allow any consideration to check the freedom with which you write to me, since I am now and shall be henceforward altogether and without reserve your very humble and devoted servant"[1]—thus did he write to her with the generous courtesy of expression that must often have astonished those who approached him with tremulous diffidence. And in her he found one of the faithful souls on whom no pains are wasted, and his skill and patience guided her to the goal of her desire. Without him she might never have attained it, for, as we have seen, public opinion could easily be ranged against her, and in those days the arm of the law was frequently interposed to support parental authority.

At one stage when Mme. de Montfan, having secured to herself the use of her daughter's fortune, had yielded on all essential points and the doors of the Visitation Convent were opening, she checked the advance of the eager postulant by a command that she should continue to wear her ordinary garb. François de Sales gave an assurance that Mme. de Dalet should never be clothed a Novice of the Visitation without her mother's consent, but he coupled with it the statement of his own conviction that God called her into Religion. And when he gave the direction to the daughter that fulfilled his pledge to the mother he did not undervalue the cost of obedience.

[1] *Œuvres*, XX. 1790, p. 79.

"Keep then to your secular garb while you behave as a Religious," he wrote,[1] "that you may satisfy the claims made by Religion and by your mother at one and the same time. You will not be less pleasing to your Heavenly Spouse, Who does not regard the exterior, and you will not really be less favoured though you may seem to be so. It is no small thing to abide within the porch of the House of the Lord. . . . My very dear Daughter, cling close to the Cross of Jesus Christ, Who for you endured such contradiction against Himself; let Him be your sole aim, and have no delight except in pleasing Him."

To be able to accept the interior mortification of the Rule while retaining the livery of the world, implied a rich capacity for self-surrender, and François de Sales had satisfied himself that this new subject had such capacity. Mme. de Dalet bore the test, and in September 1628 she reaped the reward of patience and was clothed as a Novice. Her years of probation had imbued her with the spirit of the Order, and she was required to take up the responsibilities of a Superior as soon as she was professed. She has her place among the privileged few who were trained for their office by the Founder, although she never beheld him in the flesh. The last of his letters to her,[2] written in the autumn before his death, sets his seal on her welcome to the Visitation. "I tell you simply that I see nothing to keep you in the world, not even the expectation of a future vocation in your daughter which, being still doubtful, cannot be set against the certainty of the call to you. Follow this closely, firmly, patiently, but without excitement and without anxiety. God Who hath begun this work in you will perform it unto the end."

A saintly monk in the calm of a monastic library, writing to one of a few privileged souls entrusted to him, could not have manifested deeper concern for the progress of an individual than did François de Sales, in the last months of his busy life, when he breaks the barriers of distance and sends his thoughts to that unknown daughter of his in her home in the Auvergne.

[1] *Œuvres*, XX. 1928, p. 333.

[2] *Ibid.* 1938, p. 358.

CHAPTER VIII

The Call of Religion

The appeal of his "Introduction to Devout Life" fell with varying effect, as we have seen, on the ears of those dwellers in the world for whom it was intended, and the writer, while ostensibly he framed it for dwellers in the world, was never more satisfied with results than when he had thrown discredit on the pride of life and struck at the roots of pleasure. Probably, as he grew older, and his experience of prayer and also his knowledge of courts and cities widened, he became a keener advocate for complete withdrawal—yet at the time of writing his "Introduction" he reminded his readers that "A single day of prayer was worth more than a thousand years of worldliness."[1] And so there were some who—because they were able to perceive his true intention—feared to approach him lest they also might be made his spiritual captives and become the slaves of God.

If it be true that he asked more of souls in the last years, it is true also that he had greater power to draw them to him. His conquest of Hélène Lhuillier belongs to the months of his embassy in Paris, and there is not one of the many spiritual histories connected with his ministry in which he appears more plainly as the agent of forces higher than himself; for she possessed personal charm, and rank, and wealth, and by nature she loved the world, yet by grace she had courage to reject all it offered that she might enrol herself among his daughters.

Mlle. Lhuillier de Frouville lost her mother in childhood, and at seventeen became the wife of Thomas Gobelin, Seigneur de Var. After seven years of distress her marriage was annulled, and she would have entered at once upon

[1] *Int. à la Vie Dévote*, Part IV. ch. ii.

another alliance if an unexpected scruple had not deterred her. Perhaps the scruple came by suggestion from her sister, Marie de Villeneuve, by whom it was encouraged until it assumed formidable proportions. The sisters were readers of the works of François de Sales, and Marie was one of his very fervent admirers. The question of Hélène's position required solution by some very high authority, and she decided to make the long journey to Savoy and lay her sister's case before the unknown Bishop of Geneva, whose written words had seemed to her so rich in wisdom.

Actually the journey proved unnecessary, because these heroic measures were contemplated in the year 1618, and the news that the Bishop of Geneva was on his way to Paris cancelled the preparations. Just at this time Hélène Lhuillier had reached a crisis in her destiny. The offer of marriage awaiting her decision promised the delights her nature craved, and the suffering of the past gave her the better right to pleasure in the future; yet she could not still the doubts that dragged at her. It was Mme. de Villeneuve who asked advice from the Bishop of Geneva when he arrived, and such was her excess of anxiety that she might easily have wrecked the cause she had at heart. His wisdom covered her imprudence, however, and while he remained in Paris he made no effort to influence Mlle. Hélène. He told her the former marriage was no bar to a second alliance; and when she poured out her questionings and doubts he played the part of sympathetic listener, offering consolation of a general kind. In fact, her uncertainties lasted long after he had left Paris, yet each time that she reviewed them the impression made by that quiet listener and his unspoken counsel must have grown more insistent, until at length she asked for his solution of the problem of her future.

On May 31, 1620, a letter[1] addressed to Mlle. Lhuillier de Frouville left Annecy for Paris. It may have been the first that the Bishop wrote to her, and it was written in response to her direct appeal for help. Through the long months of uncertainty the call of Religion had been gaining force, despite the vehement longing for this world's tangible

[1] *Œuvres*, XIX. 1655, p. 213.

delight that clamoured ceaselessly against it. And the decision must be made. The letter—long awaited—began by assuring her of this; she was free to choose!

"And now, my daughter, how shall we use this freedom that is ours? We desire, of course, to submit it entirely to Him from Whom we hold it; for our resolve is fixed, and without any exception or any reserve, even the reserve of a single moment, we desire to live entirely for Him Who, to win true life for us, was ready Himself to die upon the Cross.

"But how? In what state of life? Under what conditions? To remain under your present conditions would seem to be simplest, but would in fact be most difficult. The world of Paris or of any part of France is incapable of leaving you to live at peace as you are; it will never desist from the effort to push you into breaking your resolution. And to feel assured that your resolution is too fixed to be shaken and even reversed, is to feel assured of an absolute miracle considering your age, your appearance, and the number of the special pleaders in the cause of the world and its wisdom, who surround you, and from every side will attack your peace of mind, without respite and without pity, until by pressure, or by trickery, or by surprise, they reach the end at once of their endeavour and of your resistance. I know that this is a point I need not labour, since you have seen it for yourself and have acknowledged the impossibility. Thus the choice that remains for our consideration is between marriage and the Religious Life.

"But, my very dear daughter, I have no need of remarkable clearness of vision to see which way I should direct you; for as you have now explained and as you told me when it was my good fortune to have intimate knowledge of your soul, your feeling against marriage arises from two causes, of which one alone would be enough to restrain you from embarking on it: a strong aversion, an overmastering distaste, an entire repugnance. Ah, my daughter, this is more than enough, it is needless to discuss it further. Truly those who are naturally desirous of marriage, though they be sufficiently happy in it, find so many demands for patience and mortification that their burden is as much as

they can support. And how would you fare when you entered on it against your inclination? . . . My dear Daughter, after having listened to you and read your letter on this subject, I say to you boldly, 'Truly, since thus it is with you it is not expedient that you should marry.' . . . Now, I say this with all the more confidence, because I see more danger in marriage for you than for others, on account of the cravings of ambition you have acknowledged, which would make you perpetually yearn after greatness and be for ever immersed in vanity.

"But having reached this conclusion in such a manner that there can be no room for scruple with regard to it, it is a much harder matter to take a further step and say: 'Then you must enter on the Religious life.' Nevertheless, it must of necessity be said, because neither the custom nor the manners of France, nor the tradition of your family, nor your age, nor your appearance, would allow you to remain as you are. I say then of necessity: 'My Daughter, you must choose the Religious life,' but in saying it I find a hidden sweetness in necessity which makes it gentle and attractive rather than necessary. The Angels forced that good man Lot and his wife and his daughters, and took him by the hand and constrained him to leave the city, but Lot did not feel any violence in their force, indeed, he declared he was assured of having found grace with them. And Our Lord says to the servant in the parable: 'Compel them to come in,' and not one of those under compulsion said: 'Leave me alone, you hurt me.' I am forced and compelled to say to my Daughter: 'You must enter Religion,' but this compulsion gives my heart no pain.

"O my Daughter, just for a little let us speak heart to heart. Do you think that God always gives a vocation to Religion, or indeed to true devotion, so that it accords with the natural conditions and dispositions of the souls He calls? Indeed, no, my Daughter, do not think that! The Religious life is not a natural life, it is above nature, and it must needs be that this life is given and sustained by grace. It is true that supreme Providence often makes use of nature in the service of grace, but this is by no means always, nor almost always so.

"He who complained so bitterly: 'The good which I will I do not, but the evil that I would not is in me; that is to say—in my flesh dwelleth no good thing, for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. Alas, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God by Jesus Christ!' He, I say, bears strong witness that his nature gave no aid to grace, and that his desires were not restrained by his aspirations. And he, nevertheless, was one of the most perfect servants of God that has ever been on earth, and was in the end so blessed that he could say with truth: 'I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me,'—after nature had been made subject to grace and aspiration had mastered desire.

"My Daughter, these fears of finding superiors inconsiderate and these other alarms which you are so faithful in declaring to me, these will all vanish before the face of the Crucified Saviour which you will eagerly embrace. Your soul, which has been generous with the generosity of the world, shall renew its strength, and become generous as are the Angels and the Saints. You will see the folly of human reasoning and argument and you will laugh it to scorn. You will love the preaching of the Cross, which to the heathen is foolishness and to the Jews a stumbling block, but unto us, that is to say to those that are saved, the supreme Wisdom, the power and the virtue of God.

"But, my Daughter, here is a very great mitigation of advice that seems so rigid and so stern. You are rich; the twentieth, or perhaps the hundredth part of your means is sufficient to secure for you the position of Foundress to a Monastery, and in that character you will have a graceful opportunity to lead a devout life out of reach of the world's clamour, while you wait until use and thought and inspiration give the last spur to your heart and the crowning touch to your resolution, and make you completely a Religious. Thus you would cheat your nature and skilfully entrap yourself. Oh! as our Saviour lives to Whom I am consecrated—this suggestion has no motive of any kind save the peace and repose of your soul.

"And, meanwhile, pray to God, my very dear Daughter,

humble yourself, live your life in view of eternity, uplift your intentions, purify your aims, remember often that even a little advance in the love of God is very important, since it will remain to our glory for all eternity. And finally, your own capacities, and all that God has done to claim you for Himself, and a thousand other reasons demand of you something greater than ordinary Christian generosity ! I advise you to confide in the good Mother of the Visitation just as you would in me, for she will serve you faithfully. And I am for all time and unreservedly your very humble, constant servant."

It was more than a month later, July 2, that the letter reached its destination. We may picture Hélène Lhuillier passing through unceasing alternations of mood as the weeks dragged on and she waited for the answer. Her strong nature, still undisciplined, could ill bear the long suspense. She took prompt action when the answer came, and in that displayed, together with her acceptance of wise counsel, her shrinking from any further period of indecision. On the day she received it she was admitted as a postulant to the Visitation Convent. Her youth and power of enjoyment, her charm and popularity, her wealth and all the chances of self-assertion that it offered, these things were cords that bound her to her natural place, and François de Sales, as he urged upon her the claim of a supernatural obligation, bore them in mind. For Hélène Lhuillier the peace of the cloister had no attraction ; she feared a life enclosed by convent walls, yet it seemed to her that God had called her to it. Her friend and counsellor, with the compassion learnt from his Master, showed her an easier way and left her free to take it ; but while he knew her suffering and suffered with her he must have hoped that her generosity might indeed prove itself to be that of " the Angels and the Saints," and he was not disappointed. He had confirmed her belief that God required her to give ; and on that assurance she proceeded to offer without stint " her liberty, her understanding—all her will."

The deep rejoicing that her decision caused, when tidings of it arrived at Annecy, is expressed to Mme. de Villeneuve —whose own share in the offering was so considerable.

To her S. François wrote [1] that the sacrifice had been made "heroically after the manner of the early Christian souls in the first and purest age of Christianity." He congratulated this loving and devoted sister because, as Mme. de Chantal told him, she was as much concerned as if it had been possible for her to make the sacrifice herself—and indeed much of the joy of life was shut away from her by the convent door that hid Hélène Lhuillier from the world. His mingling of praise and sympathy was well designed to bring comfort to an aching heart, and she for whom he wrote merited tenderness. To Mlle. Hélène herself, however, although he wrote to her on the same day to greet the same event,[2] he showed a different aspect of his mind. There was for her also the opening note of congratulation on her "promptitude," and the blessings that were certain to accrue from it, but from him to her, who had now become one of his Daughters of the Visitation—his very own in a sense that he and they only could fully understand—to her there was something to be said for which she had not hitherto been ready.

"Lift up your thoughts then, my dear Daughter, lift up your thoughts often to the eternal blessedness that will be yours in Heaven for having done what you have done. It is nothing, indeed (and I am well aware that you realise this) it is absolutely nothing compared with your duty towards God and with the everlasting reward that He prepares for you; for what are all these things which we reject and give up for God? First and last they are but a few paltry moments of a freedom which is a thousand times a worse bondage than slavery itself, the bondage of constant anxiety, and longings that are futile and shifting and impossible to satisfy, which keep us fretted by a host of cares and worries, and this for our miserable span of days, so uncertain and 'few and evil.' Nevertheless, it has so pleased God that whosoever gives up these vanities and little satisfactions of the moment wins in exchange the glory of eternal happiness, in which just this remembrance of having tried to love God with all our heart and of having advanced just one little step nearer eternal love will overwhelm us with joy.

[1] *Œuvres*, XIX. 1696, p. 315. [2] *Ibid.* 1695, p. 313.

"Truly, my very dear Daughter, I would never have let myself say to you: 'Tread under foot your likes and dislikes, your fear and your shrinking,' if I had not trusted in the kindness of your Heavenly Spouse to give you strength and courage to take the side of holy suggestion and good sense against that of self-will and prejudice. Nevertheless, my very dear Daughter, I must needs say this to you, you are now calmly dead unto the world and the world is dead in you; this is one part of the sacrifice. Two parts still remain; one is to flay the victim, turning your heart inside out, cutting away all those little inclinations which are prompted by nature and are of the world; the other is to burn your self-love to ashes and change your precious soul to flames of heavenly love. Now, my Daughter, truly so dear to me, this is not the work of a day, and He by Whose grace the first blow has been struck will Himself deal the other two; and, because His is a father's hand, either you will feel nothing, or if you suffer He will give you the constancy, and also the joy, of the saint [1] whom we celebrate to-day. Wherefore you must not be fearful: He Who has given you the will is able to accomplish. Only be faithful in a few things and He will establish you over many things."

Those who would realise the spirit of the Visitation must make discoveries for themselves; no Rule that was ever framed could teach their Founder's true intention, and only with the endeavour to fulfil it came knowledge of the cost. That it should have been so goes without saying, for the way of the Visitation nun was to be the way of the life of prayer, with its gradual disclosure of new heights to scale, of new meanings and new purpose in surrender. "My daughter, this is not the work of a day!" Hélène Lhuillier, by nature a joyous and successful worldling, faced the task of destroying nature. For such as she there may be solace in outward practice; in the use of fast and discipline and vigil; but the summons—that came while the life of Religion was still strange to her—meant something that could not be met by strong resolve and physical endurance. "Burn your self-love to ashes,"—nothing

[1] S. Lawrence.

less! Search out those hidden places where self-love abides, the secret vanity, the unsuspected malice; be tireless in searching and pitiless in dealing with the fruits of search! This was the Founder's summons to the worldling drawn by the grace of God within the fold of the Visitation. The surrender made by this soul must be complete; her offering, if it were made with the least shadow of reserve, would stand for mere self-deprivation of the most useless kind. So to this very dear daughter he gave the message reserved for his most cherished children, judging rightly that she was able to receive it.

La Mère Hélène Angélique stands out among many notable figures in the early history of her Order; and it is plain that the generosity of her early character did not fail her in Religion. Counted in terms of weeks and months her intercourse with François de Sales was brief, and she never saw him again when he quitted Paris. He had set the task for a lifetime, however, and year after year she laboured at it. In the long effort to destroy self-love she brought her great gifts into the captivity of the obedience of Christ and, so consecrated, they came to their full fruition. Of this there is ample testimony. And indeed the story of her life presents a paradox, for the world she loved had held her in a bondage hard to bear, and only behind convent walls and under the Rule of a Religious did her spirit find the liberty for which it craved. In her we find a great example of the Visitation spirit, in its work on natures of strong individuality. "*Tout par l'amour, rien par force.*"

PART III

THE VISITATION AND THE "TREATISE ON THE LOVE OF GOD"

PART III

CHAPTER I

The Preparation of the Founder

The year 1610 is the formal date of the founding of the Visitation. In the summer of that year Mme. de Chantal and her two first companions were established in the Maison de la Galerie just without one of the city gates of Annecy, and the Foundation was publicly accomplished; but to trace the connection between the new Order and its Founder we must go back to much earlier history.

The young priest who risked his life day by day among the Calvinists round Thonon and fought untiringly in the interest of his converts against high authority in the Court, the Council-chamber, and the Church, showed himself capable of great achievement without displaying any tendency that foreshadowed his real future. We are concerned here with the influences which made of that eager missionary the Founder of the contemplative Order inseparably associated with the Devotion of the Sacred Heart. And our concern with them is the deeper because the influences that bore strongly on the life of François de Sales are just those that counted for so much in the spiritual awakening of France. They emanated from the Society of Jesus, from the new Oratory, from the French Carmel: and from each of these sources he drew something of its individual inspiration to enrich the Vision that was to come into being as the Order of the Visitation.

We have seen in what large measure François de Sales owed his training, intellectual and spiritual, to members of the Society of Jesus, and in what high esteem he held the Society. At first, no doubt, he recognised in them the

strongest defending force against the peril of Protestantism and so could not withhold respect and gratitude; yet it is not in its militant aspect that the Society was most important in his life, nor is the measure of its importance easy to gauge. The teaching of the "Introduction to Devout Life" is very plainly that of a mind schooled to the Exercises; in the later teachings of the same mind we find different tendencies, and it would be natural to see the transition as a passage from one influence to another. At all times François de Sales intended to accept authority, to draw from others rather than to originate [1]; and in his reverence for the discoveries of other minds he diverts his readers from the personal contribution to which his welding of material owed its value. It is characteristic that, having seen the great results achieved by the following of the Ignatian method, he desired always to have a Jesuit to aid him during the rare interludes in his crowded weeks, when he retired into solitude—"to take himself to pieces," as he described it. Meditation carefully prepared and carried out by Rule seemed to him the daily bread of the soul, and he attributed to it so much of his vitality that he accepted only with difficulty the offer of sustenance by other means. And as we follow him—in his practice as in his teaching—on a way that disclosed new vistas, we shall see that no stage of it was unknown to his first master. He might learn from other guides and fellow-travellers, yet S. Ignatius remained his leader.

It is recorded of the first generation of Spanish Jesuits that they remonstrated at the narrow limit of time their Rule allowed for prayer, and that they obtained no satisfaction from their Founder, who told them they would find fifteen minutes enough to renew their union with God day by day if they were living truly mortified lives. An echo of that severe response may be found among the reminiscences of Mme. de Chantal,[2] whose privilege it was to have intimate knowledge of the interior life of S. François.

"I asked him if he had had time for prayer that day. He answered 'No! but that he had had what did as well.'

[1] "Je ne dis rien que je n'aie appris des autres." Preface to *Traité.*

[2] *Œuvres de Ste. Chantal*, iii. 173.

Which I can well believe, as he strove always to be in union with God, doing all that he did purely for Divine Love and for no other object."

The Suscipe in fact expressed his aspiration: "Take and receive, O Lord, my whole liberty, my memory, my understanding, all my will"; and it was the union pictured by the faithful sons of S. Ignatius towards which he strove.

Because we are accustomed to regard Ignatius Loyola as the disciplinarian of devotion we forget the greatness of his privilege as a contemplative. Because, with infinite care, he marked out a route by which a puzzled wayfarer might attain the object of his journey, we assume his ignorance of other paths; although the way along which God had guided him was not one which a man may choose for himself, or point out for the guidance of his fellows. It is easier to give his teaching its true place if we see it in relation to the movements of his time. When he and his two followers pledged themselves to the defence of the Faith against heresy, the heresy of Luther and Calvin, though it loomed large and threatening, was not the only menace to the peace of the Church. Ignatius Loyola sprang from the nation which gave the greatest among mystics to the Church of the West, and had experience of the particular temptations that wait on mysticism. Already, in the sixteenth century, the Quietist peril was recognised, and it behoved him to be on his guard against it; his position had indeed peculiar responsibility because the men he called to prayer had not prayed before he roused them, and it was as men of prayer that they were exposed to this new danger.

"God comes into souls just as the sun comes into houses, their part is to open the door to Him,—that is to say to remove anything that could get in His way, and to agree to His coming. When that is done all further doing is His." Thus did S. John of the Cross instruct his disciples, and did so without fear because he spoke to the chosen few who were able to receive his message. If he had delivered it to the vast audience reached by S. Ignatius he might have started many a soul on the road towards disaster. And so, for the greater good of the greater number, Ignatius

preached method, and rules of prayer, and the ordered use of every faculty in the service of God. To some minds it has appeared that his scheme is too mechanical, tending to check possible development; such a suggestion can hardly be maintained by students of ascetic and mystical theology, however, for the sons of S. Ignatius have been showing the way of ascent to an endless procession of aspiring souls ever since the Society and the services it offered were accepted by the world.

It was the early Jesuit teaching, and in particular the use of the Spiritual Exercises, that concerned François de Sales; and it was in his lifetime and during the first half of the seventeenth century that the Church was making ready, largely by the use of the Spiritual Exercises, for that revelation of intimate approach to Jesus known as the Devotion of the Sacred Heart. François de Sales, deliberate by nature and conservative by tradition, found it hard to set aside the method which had become part of his being; but, when at length his time of preparation was complete, he did free himself from it, and went forward with unerring step, proving, if proof were needed, that Ignatian training was no hindrance to aspiration or to achievement in the way of prayer.

The founding of the Visitation Order cannot be attributed solely to Jesuit influence, however, strong as that influence undoubtedly was in the life of the Founder, for he drew inspiration from every source that was open to him. The record of his communications with Pierre de Bérulle is very meagre, yet it is sufficient to disclose the warmth of their friendship and mutual respect.[1] We know that the scheme for establishing the Oratorians in Paris had his fullest sympathy, and that he must have discussed it with the Founder at a time when discussion was likely to clear and systematise his own thoughts of the Visitation. Bérulle and his friends began their life in community in the Faubourg S. Jacques within a year of the establishment of the three first Sisters at Annecy; and, in process of time, it became manifest that the same spirit animated both companies,

[1] In 1603 a letter of S. François refers to Bérulle as "tout tel que je sçaurois desirer d'estre moy mesme," *Œuvres*, XII. p. 189.

although there was no outward link between them. Then a little later the mysterious revelation as to Devotion to the Sacred Heart found expression through Blessed Jean Eudes, and was given to the world by Ste. Marguerite Marie, and the thoughts of the Oratory and of the Visitation were again united. In all this there is evidence of the close links by which, in mind and spirit, François de Sales and Pierre de Bérulle were bound together.

Bérulle did not originate.[1] S. Philip Neri had established the Congregation of the Oratory in Milan for the sanctifying of the secular priesthood, and the Rule of the Oratorians in Paris was copied and adapted from the Rule obeyed in Milan. Bérulle is held responsible for the misunderstanding and unhappiness connected with the coming of the Spanish Carmelites to France; and it is possible that there his zeal betrayed him into the acceptance of an office to which he was unsuited, whereas his position as first Superior of the Oratorians used and developed his highest qualities. The Congregation, as it existed in his lifetime, expressed his mind just as the Visitation expressed the mind of François de Sales; either life would be incomplete if inward vision had not had means to become manifest, and in both the vision was high enough to dwarf petty calculations. It is true also of each that he saw the vision and the endeavour to realise it, as a trust placed in his hands by God Himself, desired in it the fulfilment of His Will, and was ready to accept failure if it came as part of the Divine purpose. There is a point of resemblance also between the two institutions in that the primary object of each member was realisation of the indwelling of Christ. If such distinctions are permissible we would say that it was this indwelling rather than the imitation of their Lord to which their lives bore witness. Their thought centred on Jesus so completely that the importance of self, in activity or intention, dwindled towards extinction. The representative Fathers of the Oratory, at its greatest period, had not the characteristics or the capacities of men who

[1] For Pierre de Bérulle, see Houssaye, *Bérulle et les Carmélites de France*; *Bérulle et l'Oratoire de Jésus*; Nourrison, *Le Cardinal de Bérulle*; and Bremond, *Hist. litt. du sentiment religieux en France*, Vol. III.

organise reforms and change the standard of their generation. They strove as little for result as did the daughters of S. François; they were fixed on the same objects with the same pure intention, and so in differing form the same message was communicated to them.

In the first period under Bérulle and Condren the Devotion to the Child Jesus was identified with the Oratory; and the development of that later Devotion with which the name of Blessed Jean Eudes[1] is associated was evolved naturally from that beginning. Among the first group of Oratorians were men of great intellectual capacity, born to high place in the world; they, accepting the words of Jesus simply, judged that to become as little children in the sense that He intended they must approach Him in His perfect Childhood. From contemplation of the Child, Eudes passed on to the Mother, to the Suffering Heart of Mary, and so by one further step to the Divine Heart of her Son in His Manhood, the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He had left the Oratory and founded his congregation in his native Normandy before he gave the outcome of his meditation to the world; yet in a mind so receptive the years of association with Bérulle and Condren counted for much. Moreover, Eudes was fittingly prepared for his great task of giving form to the Devotion of the Sacred Heart by a life of constant service, and, while his path led him through the midst of a turmoil of affairs, he retained the spirit of the contemplative. Differing widely in many points, he and François de Sales were alike in this, that they could give complete attention to the business claimed by their vocation and yet remain fixed and intent upon that Heavenly Vision which had been vouchsafed to them. Dwellers in the world have learnt anew, through the Devotion of the Sacred Heart, that Jesus consents to have His part in the tasks of every day; and, if we observe these two in their daily practice—S. François first, clear in his spiritual apprehension of a truth that had not yet found form, and Jean Eudes with his scheme for sharing his own method of devotion with other souls—we see in both the unwavering purpose of hourly self-offering by which the hearts of men and women make approach

[1] Boulay, *Vie du vénérable Jean Eudes.*

to the Divine Heart. Jean Eudes,[1] disciple of Pierre de Bérulle, gave his discovery only to the few; it was left for Marguerite Marie Alacoque, cloistered nun and humble daughter of François de Sales, to proclaim it so that the tidings might penetrate to the uttermost parts of the earth.

The movement then that brought religion back to vigorous life in France was prompted by the thought of the Sacred Heart of Jesus ever yearning for the souls of men. From that thought François de Sales and Pierre de Bérulle drew the driving force for their labours in the Great Revival, and both alike had knowledge of those treasures of devotion which, in fuller and clearer revelation, were so soon to enrich the Church. The work of François de Sales as a Founder is far more important than that of Bérulle because he originated instead of adapting, and he proved his genius for discernment by drawing from all sources just those elements that would help him to the perfect expression of his thought. Yet all he gained from intercourse with the thinkers of his own generation did not suffice for so high an enterprise. Great as was the treasure of awakened thought, there was need of impetus more definitely supernatural.

We have seen that his humility welcomed every opportunity of spiritual advance; he sought guidance from the Jesuits in youth and manhood; when duty summoned him to Paris he went in eager expectation of gain for mind and spirit, and welcomed association with Bérulle and the group surrounding him as much for profit as for the joy of fellowship. Nevertheless his greatest treasure was not won by deliberate effort; almost it may be said that he stumbled on it unawares, for it awaited him in Dijon, and he had gone to Dijon reluctantly, without strong confidence in any mission to her citizens. The third Carmelite Convent in France was not established in Dijon until 1605, the year following his sojourn there, yet by means of it Carmelite thought was revealed to him. The effect of that gradual revelation on his spiritual development cannot be measured. Although intellectually he had long been aware of Carmel and was concerned in the enterprise of transporting the family of S. Teresa from their native land, he received no

[1] Bainvel, Jean, on *Devotion to the Sacred Heart*, Part III. ch. v., vii.

full reflection of the light that they brought with them until it was transmitted to him through Mme. de Chantal.

The task of establishing the Order in Dijon had been entrusted to Anne of Jesus, the same Anne of Jesus to whom S. John of the Cross dedicated his Spiritual Canticle. The stern old nun made the hardest offering that could be asked of her when she accepted exile from Spain; and the years that followed brought no outward consolation. At all costs she maintained what she conceived to be the essentials of her Rule, and to do so fought desperately against Bérulle and his efforts at adaptation. Their struggle does not concern us here; it originated in differences of temperament and of race, and human weakness on either side helped to sustain it. Doubtless it was the cause of spiritual suffering to them both, but to Bérulle it was only an episode, while to the Carmelite it stood for supreme calamity. Anxiety and disappointment and loneliness must have brought her near to the complete desolation by which the chosen servants of God are prepared for special service, and, to the natural woman, the environment at Dijon was entirely displeasing; yet it was at Dijon, from behind the grille of the convent in the rue Charbonnerie, that she was permitted to send the message of S. John of the Cross out into the world.

It is evident that through her the teaching of John of the Cross reached François de Sales. Mme. de Chantal, on the threshold of the new Carmel, became aware of the mysterious forces that met the deepest craving of her soul. For more than a year she had been advancing, under the guidance that came to her from Annecy, and she was able to bear the gradual revelation awaiting her. Despite her severity Anne of Jesus encouraged the visits of a few devout ladies, and especially those of Mme. de Chantal; and thus the future Superior of the Visitation had real opportunity to learn the special secrets of prayer possessed by a spiritual daughter of S. John of the Cross. And all she had she shared with François de Sales. So, bit by bit, as he was able to receive it, he entered into possession of the spiritual inheritance destined for him.

The great conception of service with which he began his life work did not fade, rather it became clearer as a vision

still greater dawned on him. From boyhood he had practised denial of personal desire, and the call to a fuller practice of surrender found him prepared. His way of life gave scant leisure to muse over new suggestions and discoveries: for him acceptance of a call implied translation into practice. In his nature there was a certain joyousness which veiled from others his understanding of the rugged path that lies before those who would follow Christ, and of the inexorable truth that he who treads where his Master trod does so with bleeding feet ere he has been long upon the way. The sight of this chosen servant grew clearer gradually, not by a sudden revelation. Gradually anxiety for souls was merged in confidence that God's purposes will find fulfilment, and visible success lost its significance. The endeavour to win souls remained the guiding motive of all he said and did; only the interior purpose altered as he concentrated on that supreme effort after the singleness of heart required of the mystic.

It is impossible to recognise and mark the stages of that loosening hold, for there is no precise moment when he spurned the joys of friendship, or declared indifference to the consolations of a life of service. His career holds no dramatic renunciations. Others have attempted by definite resolve to free themselves from every joy of life and so increase in knowledge of the Sacred Heart; in him the process was reversed, for growing apprehension of the Sacred Heart captured his will and left him without desire for any present solace. The longing that remained was concerned with the needs of others; he asked for a time of solitude before he died, but he asked for it only that he might share the treasure he had held. And instead of the written testimony he planned, another witness was required of him. In those last grim scenes at Lyons he showed how the faithful lover travels the final stages of the Royal Road, and so passed into silence with projects unfulfilled.

And it is worth remembering that, if he had left a record of the discoveries of his prayer life in those closing years and had given final form to his regulation of the Order he had founded, he must, in doing so, have fallen from that standard he had himself set up. He realised that, if he

accepted the claims that every hour brought to him, he must forgo the accomplishment of chosen tasks, and, by that hourly acceptance, he put in practice the precept of asking nothing and refusing nothing which he had given to his daughters of the Visitation. He justified the teaching of S. Ignatius also, for, plainly, he was so far truly mortified that the unresting labour and perpetual self-giving which precluded the safeguarding of hours for prayer, did not withhold him from praying always.

CHAPTER II

The Purpose of the Visitation

When he founded the Visitation, François de Sales had not written the "Treatise on the Love of God," nor was he in sight of his later achievement in the life of prayer. At this point the form of the Order, as the Founder pictured it, was very different from the future reality. He had seen a woman, living in the world, occupied constantly with works of kindness to those about her, and at the same time penetrating more and more deeply into the mysteries of prayer. The success of Mme. de Chantal in following his directions for a life of prayer amid the distractions of the homes at Montelon and in Dijon may be held responsible for the first scheme of the Visitation. He planned for his daughters a life which should combine uninterrupted endeavour after the service and the worship of God, with active service given to the poor and unhappy.

They were to give themselves to prayer, but also they were to minister to the sick in their homes, for as yet the full purport of their vocation had not revealed itself. The description given by François de Sales himself of his intention is of the simplest. "He desired," he said,[1] "just a congregation intended for women and maidens who, by reason of bodily infirmity or incapacity to face severe austerity, cannot enter Religion as established and reformed. Here, they will have a sweet and friendly refuge and the practice of virtue necessary to true devotion."

Such, in hazy outline, was the picture that was present in his solitary musings; and the "sweet and friendly refuge" accorded with the tenderness of his regard for those who were being drawn to seek for shelter there. Some five years

[1] *Œuvres*, XIV. 610, p. 331.

earlier he had deprecated the introduction of any outward severities when the reforming of Puits d'Orbe was under discussion. "I should instil the utmost gentleness," he wrote[1]; "it would be on the interior life that I should concentrate." The Order, as it was at his death, was the fruit of concentration on the interior life; but for him as well as for those about him the implications of the phrase had been a matter of gradual discovery. The first occupants of the Maison de la Galerie were hungry for sacrifice when they took refuge there, and had already gone far along the way of renunciation; they welcomed every exercise that promised strength and light for their future training, finding only sweetness in the call to poverty and insignificance. Their eagerness revealed to their Founder the possibilities of his own conception; there is a notable difference between that first statement and one which followed a few months later, addressed to an aspirant in France.

"The place to which you are coming," he wrote,[2] "is the poor house of a little Congregation where everything is poor and humble and unattractive—save the endeavour of its members, and that is nothing less than to arrive at the perfection of Divine Love."

The second picture of the Home of the Visitation Sisters and the ideal of their adventure reflects the thought of S. Teresa, and suggests that he had renewed his study of her writings. The process of his mind differed essentially from hers, however, for while she went to work with her aim and her course of action clear in view, as might a great commander engage on a campaign, he moved forward gropingly as one who hardly dared to realise the glory of the vision vouchsafed to him. No existing Order gave opportunity for just that life which he conceived to be awaiting Mme. de Chantal; and one of the objects for which his "little Congregation" came into being was to give scope for the mysterious capacity he had discovered in her. Three years elapsed between the meeting that made the Visitation a reality to its Founders and the establishment of the first Sisters, and three years was not too long for all the reflection demanded by so important an adventure. The Bishop had

[1] *Œuvres*, XIII. 274, p. 13. [2] *Ibid.* XV. 850, p. 344.

to decide on the form of the Foundation, and also to face the question of the subjects who might be called to it. He approached both considerations in the spirit of most humble trust and without anxiety, and in both directions his needs were met at every step. No ill-advised decisions or rash experiments hampered the opening movements of the new Order, and gradual modification and development came to pass without the scars of change. Thus did the Foundation profit by the " entire peace of heart " which keeps judgment steady under any stress that comes from passing things.

As to the subjects of the new Order, the call to many of them was given unconsciously. The Bishop of a large diocese, who fulfilled the duties of his office, spent much time in journeying; and François de Sales was a most welcome guest in those country homes of his friends and kinsfolk which chanced to lie upon his route. His influence, by means of ordinary social relations, was a force that could not be measured, and, often unawares, he seems to have sown the seed which bore fruit when the time was due. The same scenes must have been very constantly repeated as he travelled hither and thither; scenes closely connected with the manners of the time, and yet not hard to reconstruct where the background of gateway and courtyard and ancient hall has survived the vandalism of the intervening centuries. Whether or not the master of the house claimed cousinship the Bishop's right to a place within the family circle was assured. And his hosts held themselves privileged in entertaining him, so that all the household thrilled with anticipation of his coming, and no labour of preparation was accounted toil.

The ritual of hospitality must be gone through when this guest, or any other, clattered into the courtyard, with certain ceremonies of greeting and entertainment; but, when these were over, there came a social hour when many who dared not venture speech might watch and listen. Topics withheld from ordinary chatter were broached on such occasions, and François de Sales would give absorbed attention to grave questions. Yet his gravity was never of such a kind as to repel the young, and he laughed readily himself and encouraged laughter. So it was not only to

those of the older generation that his coming was a great event; there were lives whose course was determined almost at the outset by the influence his presence exercised. The lad whose part it was to serve this honoured guest might find, in the steadfast glance that met his greeting, an inspiration for the far distant future; young girls—the daughters of the house and their companions—for whom the coming years held such rich promise; and children, sitting at their mother's feet with grave eyes intent upon an unfamiliar friend, caught from his words the first suggestion of the vision destined to rob them of content in time to come.

The same suggestion, sometimes after the lapse of years, emerged from memories of his Lent and Advent preaching; and thus, in scattered towns and remote country throughout his diocese, he spread the knowledge of possibilities so dazzling that, by comparison, the wealth and dignity offered by the world lost all their glamour. His summons may have been only the more insistent when it was not delivered with intention. In familiar speech as in exhortation from the pulpit he spoke from the conviction of his heart and mind; and the growing experience of years that brought him close knowledge of human lives, at all stages and in all degrees, inclined him more and more to discount the values that men and women set on passing things. Moreover, while he saw in the dedicated life the highest privilege for the individual, his sense of the needs of hosts of souls captured and chained by sin evoked the thought of reparation. Thus the process, gradual though it might be, that made of François de Sales the Founder of a new Order moved forward surely to the end stamped as inevitable.

It was on Trinity Sunday, 1610, that Mme. de Chantal, Mlle. Jacqueline Favre, and Mlle. Charlotte de Bréchard were established in the Maison de la Galerie and the Order of the Visitation came into being. The recent death of his mother and of the younger sister who was his special charge had quickened desire in the Founder to embark on an adventure that depended, for its future guidance and for present inspiration, on wisdom that is not of this world, and seemed to bring Heaven nearer. The years had held bereavement for Mme. de Chantal also, and for her in addition there

had been spiritual struggle that did not stop short of agony. Her obedience to François de Sales and her share of his venture required that she should part from her son, Celse-Bénigne, who had only just reached the age when his training ceased to be her care, and from her father. She loved them both devotedly and it was impossible to face the separation, in either case, without stages of misgiving. She came to Annecy nevertheless at the time appointed, bringing with her Marie Aimée, the bride of Bernard de Thorens, youngest of the House of Sales; and Françoise, the only one of her family of whom she still had charge. Some weeks were occupied in settling the young household and making provision for Françoise during the period of her mother's novitiate; and during those weeks the plan for the establishment of the Visitation required frequent readjustment. These uncertainties were probably a cause of grave disquiet to Mme. de Chantal. She had staked all that was dear to her on her faith in the vision her director had unfolded at the memorable interview that decided her vocation; and the months of stress through which she had been passing were not calculated to lessen any natural disposition to anxiety.

S. François remained undisturbed by the throng of difficulties that checked his plans. Here, indeed, as in other periods of crisis he was sublimely logical. If the Visitation came into being by God's Will, then there could be no doubt of its continuance; if it were of human origin, then, however promising might be its opening stages, it was sure to fail. Believing all that concerned it to be supernatural, he accepted the appearance of each obstacle as a sign of God's intention. When the promise of endowment and the house for the installation of the Sisterhood were withdrawn at the last moment, the incident provided confirmation of his idea that humble lowliness was to distinguish them. He took the little house that was their first abode on his own responsibility, and faced a future for which, humanly, there was no provision, with entire peace of heart.

The record of those first months when the new Order laid hold of life, has extraordinary beauty. Soon after their establishment the Bishop moved from the Maison Lambert,

opposite his Cathedral Church, to the Hôtel Favre, placed at his disposal as a consequence of the appointment of President Favre to high office in Chambéry. The long arcaded street that led from the South-gate and the Convent of the Poor Clares to the ancient Porte Perriere passed beneath the windows of his new dwelling, and in the Perriere Faubourg stood the Maison de la Galerie.

None of the incessant claim upon his time was suspended to give him leisure for the training of his Novices, and only proximity made possible the intercourse that at that early stage was so precious to them. The number had doubled before the end of August.[1] As the Founder's knowledge of each individual increased so did his conviction that the suggestion which called the Congregation into being was from Heaven. He profited by the precious half-hours when he could leave the business of the diocese outside the convent walls, and guide his great idea towards full realisation; for he was not content only to exhort, he desired his listeners to ask questions and make known their difficulties, and thus drew from them knowledge that he needed.

In 1610, when the group awaiting him was still a very small one, his thoughts centred on his "Treatise on the Love of God," and he brought the sheets as he wrote them, and his projects for those unwritten, to the Maison de la Galerie and discussed them with Mme. de Chantal and her companions. As time passed he used the method evolved from these discussions for other topics with which his hearers were more intimately concerned, and thus the custom of the Conferences was established. He continued to give these at intervals until the end of his life, and the record of them shows us the standard of living he set up for his Daughters of the Visitation. It shows also a gradual process of development, for at the beginning his vision of what their life should be was not complete in detail; he had to learn from their questions, and from their simple avowals of the difficulties and of the new temptations born of their new conditions, before he could frame the Rule for them and their successors.

[1] The new-comers were Claude Roget, Péronne de Chastel, and Marie Marguerite Milletot.

Those gatherings in the garden of the first convent were a precious memory to each one who shared in them, and for each must have had an individual message; nevertheless an element of danger must be inherent in such a situation. Each one of the little group had left normal interests for a great venture in the supernatural, and sooner or later the hour of reaction and uncertainty had to be faced. With François de Sales in reach the sharpest suffering might prove a blessing in disguise, for his touch gave more than the healing needed at the moment; he saw behind and beyond the griefs that were opened to him, and many a sick soul emerged from shadow into health and sunlight under his guidance. Most frequently such benefits are requited by a gratitude that expresses itself in personal devotion, and herein lay the danger; for at the Maison de la Galerie the thought of the Founder was, of necessity, associated with every incident of the day. No doubt he saw the degree to which the first group of Sisters depended upon his presence among them, and none had clearer vision for the possibilities of harm in such dependence. But his vision was not for the present moment only, and he knew the material with which he had to deal. The discipline of loss awaited each one of that little group, and each one was to emerge from the purifying of present weakness more worthy of her vocation. Because he saw that vocation as raised above normal or natural practice, he saw that it must be fulfilled through suffering.

When the Sisters moved to permanent quarters within the city walls the scheme of the Visitation may seem to have deepened in severity. In fact the demand was searching from the first, only it had needed no emphasising with the eager few gathered together in the Maison de la Galerie. Their Founder's intention, when it took shape in words, did, to a remarkable degree, foreshadow the future destiny of the Visitation; and always and unwearyingly he comes back to the description of that quality of lowliness which he regarded as the characteristic essential to them. At a very early stage he said[1] it was his purpose that those who entered the Order should be so given to prayer and so

[1] *Œuvres de Ste. Chantal*, ii. p. 186.

holy in life that they should be " worthy to serve the Infinite Majesty of God and to worship Him in spirit and in truth. While the great Orders already established in the Church are there to honour Our Lord by their stately worship and their impressive virtue, I desire my Daughters to have no aim save to glorify Him by their lowliness, that this little Institute of the Visitation should be as a humble dovecot of innocent doves, whose sole care and office is to meditate on the law of their Lord out of sight and hearing of the world."

To meditate in spirit and in truth on the laws of love, and to regard men's lives in the light of the pattern God has given, is an exercise likely to suggest just that endeavour which was destined to be associated with the Sisters of the Visitation. Their human yearning met the Divine Love in the Eucharist ; in the stillness of the Convent Chapel they found new perception for the Passion of their Lord, and for the sin that made it necessary ; and thus first one and then another became conscious of the summons to join Him in His suffering and take a share in the task of reparation. As we consider this it is interesting to remember that the scheme of the Visitation was not the vision of a devout mind sequestered from the hard reality of man's indifference and rebellion, but was evolved from very thorough knowledge of life in the world. And in the group of Sisters that made its early strength there were many who had known the fever of youth, the real and tangible delight of this world's joys. It is no small matter that among these was the Mother-Foundress, and that important figure among the first recruits—Jacqueline Favre. Mademoiselle Favre had been noted as the most perfect dancer in the society of Chambéry ; one of the brothers of the House of Sales had sought her hand in marriage ; she had received most of the gifts which make the promise of life attractive and draw the envy of the onlooker ; yet at a moment of social triumph she saw the prizes that had tempted her bereft of glamour. The daughter of Antoine Favre had inherited good powers of reasoning, and she did not act hastily. It was with the settled purpose that comes of long deliberation that she decided to accept the message

of her sudden vision, and as a means of bearing witness to it she embraced the Rule of the new Order.[1] Because her lot had been cast really in the world, she knew the degree to which professing Christians rebel against the call to interior obedience, showing in the practice of their faith an inconsistency which does not appear in business or in social dealing. Such knowledge, sinking into a generous nature and mingling with the ever-growing comprehension of Calvary and all its implications, produced in her the desire to repair, by complete giving, the withholding so evident on every hand. And as with her so was it with many who followed in her wake.

We shall look in vain for a statement of the Doctrine of Reparation from the hand of François de Sales; nevertheless the way of the Visitation nun is the way that he designed. *Tout par l'amour, rien par force,*—that from the beginning was the central thought by which the life of the Community and of the individual was to be ruled. As by her own free will each novice petitions to be clothed with the habit of her Order, so only by her own free will can she advance under its Rule. And if indeed she does advance it is Love that draws her onward; and the Voice of Love grows clearer with every step she takes. So it must come to pass that she who enters Religion, seeking the joy of closer personal communion with her Lord, has to learn that Love, of its very nature, must overwhelm all personal desire. For it was the Love of the Sacred Heart that drew the Daughters of S. François; and their contemplation taught them that pity and sacrifice must take the place of individual longing, however holy, before their atom of self-oblation could be used in the work that began at Bethlehem.

The fact that their Founder's vision foreshadowed their future destiny is so clear as to need no proof; yet there is special interest in his description of the picture in his mind. Just a year after they were established in the Maison de la Galerie he wrote to their Superior as follows: "This thought is given me by God; that our House of the Visitation by His Grace is noble enough to have its coat of arms, its blazon, and its war-cry. So I have thought, my dear

[1] See Chaugy, *Les Quatres Premières Mères*, Part I. ch. ii.

Mother, if you agree, that for our coat of arms we should take a single heart pierced by two arrows surrounded by a crown of thorns, this poor heart serving as the base of the cross surmounting it, on which will be graven the sacred names of Jesus and of Mary. Our dying Saviour gave us being by the opening of His Sacred Heart;—it is meet therefore that our heart, by persistent mortification, should always be kept encircled by the Crown of Thorns that rested on the head of our Leader, while love held Him bound to the throne of His mortal suffering."

The date of this letter is June 10, 1611,[1] being the Friday after the octave of the festival of Corpus Christi.

Later on, in his Conferences to the Sisters of the Visitation, the Founder dwells on the consuming fire of love which makes self-oblation a necessity. It is the Heart of Jesus, in its profound humility, that he showed them as the special subject for their contemplation; from it they must learn to love injustice and contempt and every wound to self-esteem. That lesson was needful if they were to be worthy of their vocation.

"It is meet that our heart, by persistent mortification, should always remain encircled by the Crown of Thorns." And those who feared to face the reality behind the symbol were not called to the life of the Visitation. S. François never softened or relaxed that first demand. He knew the craving to be at one with absolute goodness latent in all truly faithful souls. He met it with a suggestion as austere as it was simple, from which, as they were able, each one might grow to the knowledge and experience awaiting her.

Many of those who asked to join the Order came with expectations very different from the reality. The vivid temperament of François de Sales, and his lyrical tendency in speech and in writing, combined to fire the imagination of the young with glowing day-dreams no less fallacious because completely spiritual. "The Fathers are agreed," he told them, "that where rigour of corporal mortification is wanting there ought to be more perfection in mind." Only at very heavy cost was it possible to face the endeavour after perfecting of mind required of a Sister of the Visitation.

[1] *Œuvres*, XV. 693, p. 63

"There is a certain simplicity of heart," said the Founder in one of the Conferences [1] at Annecy, "in which consists the perfection of all perfections, and it is this simplicity which makes our soul look only to God and remain shut up and withdrawn within herself so that she may concentrate on obeying her Rule as faithfully as possible without allowing herself the desire to undertake anything more than that. She does not wish to do anything admirable or striking which would win human esteem, and thus she keeps herself very lowly, and without any great satisfaction; for she does nothing because she wishes to do it and nothing more than others do, and so her saintliness is not visible to herself; God alone sees it, and He delights in the simplicity with which she is able to steal His Heart and unite herself with Him. She cuts short all suggestions of self-love—that self-love which finds such over-mastering delight in embarking on whatever seems important and impressive and likely to give us a standing above others."

Many of his listeners must have recalled the vision of themselves which had loomed large in their first imaginings of the cloister: a vision of one who should bear more, embrace more, offer more, than any of her Sisters, who should, in short, be leader in the race for sanctity. For such as these the ruling-out of emulation had been a heavy test, and many another not less heavy must be faced ere they were worthy of their true vocation. The Community destined for such near knowledge of the Sacred Heart was prepared by a relentless practice of life in common. Even in service there must be no individual claim: "so long as God is glorified we must not care by whom."

[1] *Œuvres*, VI.: *Conférences*, XIII. p. 235.

CHAPTER III

The Call to Mme. de Chantal

It would be impossible to form any true idea of the development of François de Sales without knowledge of Jeanne de Chantal; and yet the task of determining the degree of her influence upon him is not an easy one. It was not a personal influence in the ordinary sense. It may be true to say that, before their meeting, he had not been fully aware of the great spiritual powers lying hidden in the souls around him. After it a new world opened to him, and his deep sense of the supernatural direction in his discovery, and in his subsequent guidance, of her showed him the magnitude of his own vocation as the guide of souls. All this has part with the new revelation of prayer life that reached him by her means, and in that gradual alteration of outlook which must be attributed to his connection with her. At the same time recognition of her profound veneration for him is essential to understanding of their effect upon each other. If any idea has ever existed that she at any moment was consciously the leader her own words dispose of it, for she put on record her impression of him from their first meeting onwards.

"I formed such an exalted opinion of him," she writes,[1] "that I said repeatedly, 'This man is not as other men.' I could not observe him without admiration, especially his bearing and the wisdom of his words, which were godly and brief, and yet so full of matter and convincing that the keenest minds were struck and satisfied; and truly ever after I received every word he said to me with the deepest respect imaginable, and was so moved to admiration by all he said and did that I could not take my eyes off him,

[1] *Œuvres de Ste. Chantal*, i. 63, *note*.

and regarded it as the highest privilege conceivable to be near him, to watch all he did and to listen to the words of wisdom that fell from his lips. If my condition had allowed it I should have thought myself only too fortunate to be the least among his servants, if by so doing I came within hearing of his blessed words. This reverence for him continued to increase, to such a point that I could not refrain from calling him a saint, which he forbade me to do. When his letters came to me I kissed them with deep respect, and often I read them on my knees and accepted all he said to me as coming from the Spirit of God ; I have never allowed the smallest letter formed by his hand to be lost. This reverence has never varied, and I have been so deeply possessed by it that all I have said or could say in praise of this Blessed One and of the excellent virtues with which his soul has been endowed by God, cannot satisfy me, for that which I have known, that which I have seen and felt, is altogether beyond anything I can say about it, and I do not believe that any creature living can make an approach to conveying the reality of God's Gifts to him."

It will be seen that the writer is awestruck by her own conception of the being she is attempting to describe ; and the sense of awe remained with her, and was in part responsible for the complete submission of will she made in the later years of their association. When he came to Dijon she was as unhappy in her spiritual as in her natural life. She had lost—by a violent death—the husband she adored, and she spent the greater part of every year under the roof of her father-in-law, where she had to suffer continual insult from the evil woman who ruled over him and his household. Under such circumstances her religion should have been her consolation, and was not so only because she had fallen into the hands of a tyrannical priest, more concerned with the securing of his own authority than with the peace of mind of his penitent. When the year 1604, the third year of her widowhood, began, she seemed without resource, hedged in on the one hand by the tradition of family life that bound her to unsuitable surroundings and associates, and on the other by petty rules that stunted the spiritual capacity which might have lifted

her above the sordid miseries of every day. Moreover, custom had no power to dull the sharpness of her daily suffering, because of the baffled longing always awake within her. She did not know whither the longing drove her; she turned this way and that, not daring to advance, yet dimly conscious of the wonders somewhere awaiting her if she could break her bonds and move towards them.

To spend Lent in Dijon with her father relieved her temporarily from one part of her burden, and made the pressure of the other part more wearisome. For she had found her director in Dijon, and to return there was to return to his insistent domination. The prospect, in the spring of 1604, gained little from the fact of his absence, because the doings of Mme. la Baronne de Chantal were watched on his behalf by devout dames with many opportunities for surveillance. She arrived in Dijon only just in time for the first Friday sermon at the Sainte Chapelle; and she has not told us if the impression she received came to her from the aspect of the preacher or from his words. She says she realised from the first that something long awaited had come into her life, and day by day, as she listened to him, her sense of wonder deepened. Never till then, perhaps, had she dared to recognise the Spirit of God as directly prevalent in affairs of her own experience; when she looked back she knew that the force which gave her freedom and opened the door to a new world had come upon her against her will, that she had done battle with it and had found it irresistible. She had pledged herself not to seek spiritual counsel except from her confessor, but he was out of reach; and as this new preacher, who made submission to the old chains so difficult, was a frequent guest at her father's house she had many opportunities of speech. Moreover, by suggesting that certain fineries she wore were inconsistent with the austerity she professed, François de Sales betrayed that he had observed her closely. And so, as Lent ended, she brought her distress to him. Neither his personal holiness nor his eloquence gave absolute assurance of his power to help her; and since the first year of his ministry his life had been too full of movement for his skill as a guide of souls to find full scope. Thus we may

see his complete realisation of the capacities entrusted to him, as evoked by the summons of her need, and that, even at the beginning, she had this office towards him to fulfil. Perhaps he had never been so conscious of inspiration in their exercise as when he met that hesitating appeal of hers. In a letter written on his homeward journey, with the thought of this still vivid, he told her that "God had given him to her." Their spiritual contact had been of the briefest; she had made her approach on the eve of his departure and their ways lay wide apart; yet he saw her call to him and his own response to it as prompted by God, and waited, expectant of further knowledge of God's purpose for them both.

He swept aside her scruples about the promises extorted by her confessor, avoiding any severe reflection on the methods under which she suffered, but taking on himself complete responsibility for her defection. Her obedience to a rule of life that forced incessant recollection of small observances had left her more and more sick at heart as each day passed; she knew that peace lay somewhere and perhaps she cherished a hope, as she planned for the weeks in Dijon, that this unknown preacher might have some message for her. Actually, whether her preparation was conscious or not, François found in her a soul prepared for his ministration, and she discovered the guide that God intended she should follow. Looking back on their experience, those weeks stood out for them both as marked by a sense of impelling power that overruled all personal choice. She returned to the dreariness of Montelon and the small hourly affronts that had seemed insupportable when she fled from them two months earlier; and she found that all the values of life had shifted and that the joy she now possessed was as absorbing as had been her former desolation.

Considering all that that transformation implies, and the impression which she has recorded of the personal saintliness of François de Sales, the effect he produced upon her seems inevitable. Until he crossed her path she had loved and rejoiced and sorrowed and despaired with all the ardour of her eager nature, and it had been all according

to nature—on human lines. His coming lifted her on to another plane; the Spirit of God spoke to her through him, and she recognised the summons and gave him complete allegiance. Death had stolen the natural joys of living, and she accepted sorrow and offered renunciation without finding peace, until this new message was delivered. Afterwards, as year by year she penetrated more deeply into the secrets of the spiritual life, and yearning and regret for former things grew dim, she did not separate the message from the messenger. All that was best in her rose in response to him when he first came to Dijon; and thenceforward till her death (after nearly twenty years of separation) his image was continually present with her, and his words brought comfort in dark hours. When she first realised the place she had given him she was afraid, and, but for her rooted conviction of his sanctity, her scruples might have proved impossible to still. But she knew that, in very truth, his whole being was fixed upon the Love of God, and in drawing her to share with him he had not lessened his fixity by a hair's breadth. He told her once that if the smallest particle of their delight in friendship was separable from the Love of God, friendship must wither, for it was the purpose that they shared that united them in spirit. This being so they need not fear to express whatever thoughts friendship inspired; and she, having learnt the lesson to good purpose, declared, in the midst of her anguish over the death of Marie Aimée (most beloved of daughters), that he meant more to her than all else that the world contained.[1]

We shall not understand their friendship if we forget his insistence on complete openness, or fail to realise that the absolute trust which she placed in him, from her first knowledge of him and ever after, was reflected—as the years went on—in his regard for her. He was supremely gifted with the insight and the wisdom of a guide of souls; he was shown all that she knew herself of her own nature, and so must have known the degree to which his personal influence permeated all her spiritual life. Thus we may conclude that there was nothing weakening in her dependence, or rather that she did not in fact depend upon

[1] *Œuvres de Ste. Chantal*, iv. p. 224.

him, and could have found her way alone upon the path to which it had been his privilege to guide her. We have the series of letters that were sent from Savoy to Burgundy during six years, and they contain repeated assurance of his eager interest in all that concerns her, and also of the consolation and happiness to himself in being able to share his intimate thoughts and anxieties where he was secure of entire sympathy. Mutual content was not the object of their friendship, however, and had merely a small part in its result. When François de Sales accepted the direction of Jeanne de Chantal he knew that he assumed a spiritual responsibility of a very special kind, and his guidance of her had place in his life-work side by side with his duties to his diocese. The gravity with which he regarded it may be inferred from a letter [1] addressed to her at an early stage of their association. This letter attains the proportions of a pamphlet,[2] and it covers so wide a range of subjects that few questions likely to be raised by an endeavour to live devoutly in the world remain unanswered.

It is well that we should have the theory of direction held by S. François at this stage, and mark two points especially thrown into relief. The first is his insistence on "the liberty of the children of God," as distinguished from the detailed rule for every hour which fostered anxiety and scruples and withered real devotion. The second is his description of the fruits of liberty. None had clearer vision of the joy of full Catholic inheritance, yet, even then, before the Visitation and its destiny had any faint foreshadowing, he would not allow passive contentment or any rest in joy. "One who possesses this liberty," he wrote, "does not cling to any consolation, but accepts trial as readily as is possible to the flesh. I am not saying he does not delight in consolations and does not desire them, I say he does not depend on them. . . . He is not cast down, because no deprivation can bring distress to those who never cling to anything. I do not mean he is never cast down, but that it passes quickly."

Mme. de Chantal was as practical in her religion as in the other affairs of life. For her the reading of that passage

[1] *Œuvres*, XII. 234, p. 352. [2] Its length is about 16,000 words.

would have been succeeded by examination of its bearing on herself, and by the inevitable discovery of her own interior clinging to the support of wise counsel and direction. It is significant that the next letter received from Annecy replies to her doubts as to her motive in giving complete allegiance to her new guide. Neither then nor at any later time did François share in the fears that haunted her over the question of her own complete sincerity. So far as a soul can truly be revealed hers was laid bare, and he descried the ever-deepening surrender behind the semblance of attachment that disturbed her; and his vision of the entire dedication that the future held grew clearer as the months passed on. The Order that he founded sprang from his thoughts of her; and the watchword that was to rule its life stood for complete surrender. Its members were "to ask nothing and to refuse nothing," and it was the part of their Mother Superior to test the implications of absolute obedience. While she was still living in the world she asked S. François for some forecast of the future, and he told her: "some day you will come to me and I shall bring you to a state of entire deprivation for the service of God." That day lay far ahead, and each one of the intervening years, whether spent in the world or within convent walls, had its share in preparing her for the supreme demand awaiting her.

One part of her training while she remained in Dijon had close concern with François de Sales; indeed it is no exaggeration to say that her intimacy with the Carmelites at Dijon had importance for him that equalled all that it meant to her. Probably the inhabitants of Dijon, and Mme. de Chantal with them, had hitherto based their impressions of life in Religion on their knowledge of the customs of Puits d'Orbe, and of Rose Bourgeois; and here the Bishop of Geneva could have enlightened them if the occasion had offered. They had been busied in learning other things from him, however, and Jeanne de Chantal, in her vague cravings for the cloister, had seen the Religious Life as a means of escape from a world full of miseries; her initiation into the meaning of self-oblation had not yet begun.

Her first touch with the Carmelites must be recognised

as an event of supreme importance, and the message they conveyed to her as standing for great and astounding revelation. The little band who had come from Paris had been trained by the stern Spanish Mother who still ruled in this new convent; and very complete surrender of hopes and inclinations had been required of them. Anne of Jesus, true daughter of John of the Cross, could not believe a Carmelite to be worthy of her vocation unless she had realised and faced the meaning of entire destitution. The novices of the first establishment in the Faubourg S. Jacques were drawn from the nobility and *haute bourgeoisie* of Paris; they were French in temperament and by tradition, and antagonism to Spain was born in them. The Spanish nuns brought Spain into the heart of Paris; they came under obedience, never doubting the inferiority of their place of exile, and with small disposition to soften or adapt their Rule for these alien subjects. The novices in Paris had to conform in their dress, their customs, and even in their food, to the Rule for the novices in each and all of the reformed Carmelite convents scattered throughout Spain. Thus the French novices had, at the beginning, an advantage over their Spanish Sisters in the devastation of self-love wrought by submission to their Rule even in outline. And from that opening exercise they passed on along the way of sacrifice, seeking to follow where S. Teresa leads.

Those who were chosen to form a new Foundation must have shown that they were infused with the spirit of the Order; and so it was the vanguard of the great procession of Carmelites to whom France owes so much that came to Dijon, and had power to kindle new fires of devotion, by their hidden lives and constant prayers, among people to whom the Faith was so habitual that their piety at times became complacent. The Carmelites were sent to such as these; and Mme. de Chantal, with her long experience in the quest for absolute sincerity of heart, was well prepared for her part as interpreter of their mysterious message.

Society in Dijon had been galvanised by the Lenten course of the Bishop of Geneva; the lukewarm became fervent and the fervent set out on a new path; yet Mme. de Chantal, strive as she might to share her privilege, had

found herself more and more separated from those who had been her associates because of the special meaning their common experience had held for her. As we have seen, that first year of spiritual guidance had been full of questionings and perplexities ; it had given her glimpses of strange joys and shown her the dimness of her spiritual sight ; as matter for habitual thought the distresses of this present life, poignant though they might be, had yielded place to reflection on the things of Heaven. All this had isolated her ; her friends in Dijon faced a familiar world with fresh hope and courage because François de Sales was sent to them, while for her the world had been transformed. She remained alone in her groping endeavour to find her way in a strange country, until that day when God guided her to the Carmelite parlour ; then, in the confidence exchanged with her spiritual sisters behind the grille, she found fellowship, and was admitted to a share in their discoveries. Thus she entered on the inheritance reserved for her.

Her intimacy with Carmel marks a new stage in her association with François de Sales. Almost from the first he had acknowledged a debt to her. Very early in their correspondence he wrote[1] : " Your messenger reached me at about the most difficult and dangerous moment that I could have in my voyage on the stormy seas of this diocese, and the amount of consolation your letters bring me is altogether beyond belief." And, as time went on, it became more and more his custom to unburden his heart to one who had such capacity for comprehension and response. Her touch with the Carmelites provided her with a very precious contribution to the treasures of spiritual knowledge that they held in common, for she endeavoured to pass on all she received, and S. François never failed in eagerness of interest. It is certain that methods of prayer were a frequent subject of discussion, during the brief intervals in five years of separation when they met face to face, and that he regarded S. Teresa and her Daughters with awestruck reverence. Nevertheless, while Mme. de Chantal found in the Carmelite teaching the natural development of the revelation which had come from his mind to hers, he found it hard to

[1] *Œuvres*, XII. 240, p. 380.

assimilate with the practices that had been the frame of his prayer life.

In 1607, a year we have already noted as of extreme importance to them both, she came to Annecy with her heart and mind full of the gift of knowledge bestowed by Carmel. The Bishop had desired she should make the journey, and it was then he declared to her the scheme of the Visitation. She had come in a spirit of complete submission, ready to accept his guidance whatever the cost might be; and the future he unfolded, instead of offering a test of obedience, fired her with eager longing for its realisation. In their thought of the Visitation the minds of these two seem thenceforward to have been at one. While she remained under the roof of Mme. de Boisy the subject of prayer must more than ever have been their constant theme; and she had the gift of words and was well able to give out all she possessed herself. Despite the impression of unity in thought and desire, however, François de Sales was slow in accepting his share in the treasure that she held, because, while she was born to tread the way of the mystic and could not advance by any other path, he had already travelled far by a different road. We have proof of his tardiness of understanding in a letter she received only a few months before the Order of the Visitation came into being. In it we find these passages[1]: "As to these instructions on prayer which you have received from the good Mother Prioress, for the moment I will say nothing; only I would have you find out as much as you can of what all this rests upon, for, to be candid with you, although it happened that two or three times last summer, realising the Presence of God without preparation or intention, I felt myself receiving great favours from His Majesty, being filled with a sense of love of which I was hardly conscious, which was simple and continuous and very sweet, it remains true that I never dare turn aside from the high road to make a custom of that. For my part I like the way I am led by saints and simple-hearted. I do not mean that when, after due preparation, prayer seems to turn into this kind of prayer one should not go with it, but to make a system of

[1] *Œuvres*, XIV. 581, p. 266.

never preparing, that goes against me, as it does also to come away from being with God without thanksgiving or self-offering or any special prayer. All this may have its place, but that it should be made into a rule—from that I confess I have some shrinking. Nevertheless (I speak in all simplicity before Our Lord and to you to whom I cannot speak except with openness and sincerity), I do not feel that I know enough not to be very ready, I mean very ready indeed, to set aside my own opinion and to accept that of those who have every right to know more than I do; I do not mean only that of the good Mother, but also of lesser folk. Therefore learn all she feels about this and all it is based on, but quietly and without any excitement, so that she may not be aware that you are questioning her."

At this moment, on the eve of the venture that has done so much for the life of prayer, François de Sales was himself groping after truths seen only dimly and in glimpses. "Ah, my daughter," he wrote,[1] only a little later, "how I long that we should be altogether dead to ourselves that we may live altogether for God, and that our life be hid with Christ in God. Oh, when shall we ourselves live, yet not we ourselves, and when will it be that Jesus Christ is all our life?"

"To find all delight in God the soul must find its only delight in Him," said S. John of the Cross. In the midst of ceaseless activities and the burden of this world's affairs the Bishop of Geneva had touched knowledge hitherto unsuspected. For certain precious moments he had shared in the experience of the Spanish Carmelite; and in faint echo the meaning of those words, "to find all delight in God," reached his perception. Their full meaning is not revealed to those who follow that well-trodden road by which so many of "the saints and the simple-hearted" make their Heavenward ascent. That for which they stand has its intellectual implications for the student of mysticism, but spiritual comprehension of them is only for the few, and to these it is the Gift of God. François de Sales, guided by the Holy Spirit in his guidance of Mme. de Chantal, designed for her the Order of the Visitation;

[1] *Œuvres*, XIV. 601, p. 313.

and for himself, practising day by day that method of prayer in which he had been trained, he learnt what God required of him, and was obedient. The Visitation sprang from his obedience. When it had found being, and not till then, there came to him the call to leave the well-trodden road where his simplicity had been content, and take the steeper path by which a few mount towards the throne of God.

CHAPTER IV

The Book on the Love of God

"A GREAT happiness in perfection would be to have no further wish for the love of any created being." Such a sentiment from the lips of François de Sales must have come with something of a shock, yet Mme. de Chantal records it [1]—and that he went on: "What does it signify whether you are liked or not? If anything happens that shows you are disliked you must go on your way without allowing yourself to be disturbed by it." Reflecting on that theme she questioned him.

"I ask for the glory of God—to be helped to humble myself. I have thought that I might be very particular never to say anything which could bring me any sort of praise or admiration."

His reply asked more than she offered.

"Without doubt he who speaks but little of himself does well; for whether we speak of ourselves in self-defence, or in self-accusation, or in self-applause, or in self-contempt, we always find our words have served as a bait to vanity. So, unless there be some authentic claim of charity demanding talk of ourselves and our concerns, we must hold our peace."

François de Sales, by reason of his gift of sympathy, spent much time in listening to those who discourse without stint about themselves, and he knew the weaknesses of devout and faithful souls. It was only to very few that he would have ventured a demand so searching, and perhaps it was the eagerness of the response that drew him on to further probing. If we follow the correspondence, from the Lent preaching in Dijon in 1604 to the establishment of the new

[1] *Œuvres de Ste. Chantal*, ii. 36, 44.

Order at Annecy in 1610, we gain real intimacy with Mme. la Baronne de Chantal, and we discover that the world and its standards linger in a bereaved and lonely heart even though it be set towards Heaven, and are relinquished only by slow stages. François de Sales watched her gradual progress in renunciation and learnt to estimate the possibilities of the future, when the world's visible snares should be shut out by convent walls, and every force left free to meet the spiritual deprivation by which the true religious is born into new life. The guarding of the lips he had prescribed was a small matter compared to the assault upon interior self-love that followed: "I repeat what I have said to you so often that, not only in prayer, but in all you do, you should go forward in the spirit of confidence in God —quite complete and quite simple, as entirely yielded and given up to His good pleasure as a little child who leaves himself to be led and directed by his mother. Further, and to the end that you may go forward resting in the love and care of this all-merciful Father, get calm and quiet hold upon your soul, and do not indulge it with self-consideration, nor with calculations as to advance, or as to being satisfied; for, my dear Mother, there is nothing pleasing to the Eyes of God in our self-satisfaction, it only ministers to our own self-love."

The sentences flowed smoothly from his pen and there is nothing in them to arrest the imagination of the indifferent. Yet for the reader to whom they were addressed they stood as warning of the tests still to be faced, and the air grows rarefied. Mme. la Baronne de Chantal had wielded the power that wealth and position gave her to such good purpose that it was not easy to relinquish it; yet when she came to Annecy to be the Mother-Foundress of the Visitation, she had achieved a measure of indifference to the world's opinion. Other and higher longings had seized possession of that ardent soul, however, and she who had succeeded so often and so notably in temporal things now looked for success in her quest of spiritual privilege. She was to learn that success had no part in S. François' vision of her future. She had become to him the type and pattern of the Sister of the Visitation, and in addressing her he set the standard

for the Community at that moment and in all time to come. She transcribed some of his counsels to her in her own copy of the Constitutions and thus preserved the pattern on which his Daughters, one and all, were to mould their consecrated lives, for it is only here and there that the personal note is touched.

"I desire that you should be extremely humble and small in your own eyes, gentle, gracious, and as guileless as a dove; that you should cherish your own insignificance and try to increase it, using every possible opportunity of doing so with good will. Do not be eager to speak, rather reply deliberately, with humility and gentleness, and let your modesty and quietness say a great deal while you keep silence. Be forbearing and long-suffering with your neighbour in all tenderness of heart. Never brood over the mishaps that befall you; don't look at them; look at God, taking all things without any exception as from His Hand, agreeing to everything quite simply. Do everything for God, uniting yourself or maintaining union just by turning —or by the flowing of your heart—towards Him. Never be in a hurry, do everything calmly, in the spirit of quietness. Whatever happens do not lose your inward peace, even when everything capsizes; for what are all the things of this life in comparison with peace at heart? Confide all things entirely to God and find your own security and rest in His fatherly protection. Our Lord loves you, He desires you to be His entirely. Never more seek support from any arms but His, nor lean on any breast save His. Your eyes must not wander elsewhere nor your spirit find any rest except in Him. Hold your will so simply joined to His that nothing divides them; forget everything else, clinging to nothing; for God accepts your nakedness and simplicity; so remain and be at peace in a spirit of simple trust. Be of good courage and hold yourself humbly before the Providence of God. Desire nothing but the pure love of Our Lord. Refuse nothing however painful it may be. Take refuge in Our crucified Lord; adore Him in His sufferings." [1]

Musing on these counsels the imagination conjures up a vision of a cloistered nun defended from exterior distractions

[1] *Œuvres de Ste. Chantal*, ii. pp. 65–7.

and engrossed more and more deeply by contemplation; yet they were intended for the Mother-Foundress of the Visitation, who—hardly less than S. Teresa—was required to be constantly engaged in business dealings, who journeyed often, and had frequent need of caution and of firmness in her intercourse with the men and women of the world. Moreover, those of the Sisters who followed most closely in her footsteps, like her were called upon to be alert and watchful, for each one had charge of some new venture, and every forward step entailed its own embarrassments and aroused a fresh variety of opposition. S. François did not visualise his Daughters as oblivious of the world; none knew better than he how insistent can be its pressure on the time and thought of those whose lives are given to God's service, and because he knew it so well, he exacted from them the renunciation that was most difficult. Their striving was to be without anxiety, and their will must not be set upon results; by humility of spirit and not otherwise would they learn so to wait upon God's guidance that they might be accounted worthy to fulfil His purposes.

We have seen that, while he trained and guided the first leaders of the Visitation, François de Sales was writing his "Treatise on the Love of God," and that his guidance of those eager souls was also a spiritual companionship—so that they and he advanced together; and the pages of his book recorded the discoveries made in common. He wrote to Mme. de Chantal in one of those notes that show us his reliance on her sympathy: "I am going to work upon my book on the Love of God and will endeavour to write it as much upon my heart as on the paper." [1]

He describes the book [2] as having been inspired by his Daughters of the Visitation, as well as written for them, and it is evident that the period during which it was in process of writing was rich in happiness for him, as it was for them. Only after it had been completed and given to the world did the purport of that phrase concerning writing on the heart grow manifest. That which had come into being in the glow of companionship impelled him, by its own force, to leave behind all the delight and inspiration that

[1] *Œuvres*, XIV. 572, p. 247.

[2] See Author's Preface.

could be drawn from human intercourse, and to set his face towards the heights that must be scaled in solitude.

And here again we must recognise Mme. de Chantal as the most valuable authority for the spiritual history of François de Sales after the founding of the Visitation. He died while her great powers of memory and vision and expression were at their fullest vigour; and she set herself the task of preserving, for all who might be worthy of a share in it, the treasure of knowledge she had accumulated in her years of privilege. And when she sought to show his mind in the last years, she turned to certain chapters of his "Treatise" as containing its full and true reflection. The evidence of his letters and all the records of his personal life uphold the theory that, when the writing of his book was ended, his remaining years were given to realising in practice the highest thought that it contained. We do so under Ste. Chantal's guidance if we seek his ultimate experience in such a passage as the following: "Love, entering into a soul that it may joyfully die to itself and live again in God, withdraws from it all human desires and that esteem for self which adheres as closely to the spirit as does the skin to the flesh, until at length she is stripped of her most precious affections, such as those fixed on spiritual consolation, on devout practices, or on that desire for perfection which is as life itself to a devout soul."

Here he depicts the state when sacrifice ceases to be matter for choice and becomes inevitable, because the point of desire is above the satisfying of self. He had watched the process in a few rare souls, and he knew that perfect surrender differs materially from acquiescence: "Assuredly our will cannot die any more than our soul, but sometimes it does overstep the bounds of its normal life to live altogether in the Divine Will; this is when it will neither know nor care for anything at all, save to yield entirely and without reserve to the good pleasure of Divine Providence, being so mingled and infused with this good pleasure that it no longer shows itself, but is altogether hidden with Jesus Christ in God, where it lives no longer of itself, but the Will of God lives in it."

There is a note as of discovery in this passage, of vision rather than experience. Yet every part of the "Treatise"

was much more to its author than a volume of inspired writing; each thought given to him, even while he set it down that those who read might feel themselves aflame with new desire, was in very truth graven on his own heart, so that he emerged from the long travail that his book required with a different outlook. When he dealt at length with the Union of the Soul with God in Prayer he wrote with absolute assurance. The following is a statement, not a speculation: "If the heart be once joined to God, should it remain in this union without allowing anything to intervene, it becomes more and more absorbed by an unconscious unifying process, till it is wholly in God by reason of that sacred yearning that Love has given it, to be united more and more to perfect goodness. And since it is an assured fact that Divine Love—so long as we remain in this world—is a progress, or at least an energy tending to progress, even when simple union is achieved it still moves, though imperceptibly, towards fuller development and perfection. This is like such trees as are the better for transplanting; they spread their roots after they are moved, plunging them deeply in the bosom of the earth which is their natural element and source of nourishment, and this is not observed while it is happening, but only when it has happened. And the human heart, taken from the world into God by heavenly love, if it is diligent in prayer, will certainly stretch out and draw closer to the Divinity, uniting itself more and more to Him; but its movement will not be evident while it is in progress, but will be known only when it has arrived." [1]

Under the influence of Spanish mysticism François de Sales struck roots of spiritual endeavour in new soil and, after it was written down and given to the world, the knowledge embodied in his "Treatise" became part of his spiritual experience. If we adhere to his imagery we may say with confidence that when, in 1616, he could look back on his completed work, the roots that had been struck in the writing of it had already spread far and deep. Since he began it, the Order he had founded had taken form at Annecy; the first Branch House had been established at Lyons; his original scheme had been reconsidered and readapted; and already there were manifestations of the spiritual force emanating

[1] *Traité*, Bk. VII. ch. i.

from the convents of the Visitation. Thus the conditions to which he returned in the spring of 1616 were not those from which he had entered on the long effort of his book; and if exterior conditions had changed so notably, the change in himself was incomparably more important. Perhaps the most definite manifestation of this was given at Pentecost that year.

At Pentecost the Mother-Foundress went into Retreat. Her exercises were to be directed, as on former occasions, by the Bishop; and the Hôtel Favre was so near to the Visitation Convent that he could find the necessary moments for this office. It is only because a sudden attack of illness kept him to his room that we have the written evidence of an episode infinitely momentous in the development of his spiritual relation with la Mère de Chantal. From his couch at the Hôtel Favre he sent in writing certain decisions which, had they come to her from his lips, would have been a heavy test of fortitude. Hitherto her annual Retreat had been used to confirm and deepen the way of life on which she had already entered; and it is certain that there was place always in her prayer for thanksgiving for the continuance of the spiritual unity with her friend and director which was her privilege—a privilege that stood for incommunicable happiness.

She says it was her habit to read what he had written for her on her knees, and so she must have been kneeling in her cell when she received, as part of the exercises of her Retreat, the summons to a surrender that allowed no reservation. She recognised that it came to the Mother-Foundress of the Visitation as much as to the soul that had been his peculiar care, and so she was careful to preserve for others of the Order who should follow with the same will for sacrifice as she possessed, the terms in which it had been delivered to herself.

"I would have you continue the endeavour to be emptied of self, trusting to Our Lord and to me. But, my very dear Mother, interrupt it from time to time with acts of your own, by way of ejaculatory prayer, in praise of self-beggary such as 'I am willing, Lord, drag from me all my heart clings to': 'O Lord, I withhold nothing, destroy all self in me.' This should be done calmly, yet resolutely.

Further, you must be content to remain without any support, giving up, as you have seen already, that which you have had, and remaining bereft and pitiful before the mercy-seat of God, and you must continue deprived of all things without ever seeking any human solace of any kind, indifferent to all alike who may be sent to you by Him, without concerning yourself whether it is I who serve your need or not, for otherwise you will never get out of yourself, you will cling always to a personal interest, and from that more than from anything else you must escape." [1]

Mme. de Chantal revered François de Sales as a saint. It is probably true to say that from the moment she first beheld him in the pulpit of the Sainte Chapelle at Dijon his image was seldom absent from her mind. Although she outlived him by nineteen years and seems, each year, to have advanced along the way of prayer, it is clear that to the end she made no upward step with which the thought of him was not associated. And so we are forced to recognise that the message of the Pentecost Retreat, in that aspect of it which was most bitter to its recipient, declared a position already arrived at. Their ways had already parted. Years before he had assured her that Christ Himself "has made me altogether yours and you altogether mine, to the end that we should become the more purely, perfectly, absolutely His." [2] They had been faithful to this leading until, in the process of becoming, their ways diverged; and now the time had arrived for him when "that fine point of the spirit," of which he speaks occasionally, touched something above human expression and out of reach of human sympathy.

She gloried in her certainty of his advance; yet the separation it involved meant anguish "as of the sword that severs soul from body," [3] and he seems to have had no intuition of the degree to which she suffered. In fact, he had passed the stage when there is any question of withholding sacrifice, for travellers on the path on which he had entered carry no treasure to the end; their heart is set upon the goal, and, as with every loss their step grows lighter, they cast no backward glance at former things, however precious, left behind upon the way.

[1] *Œuvres de Ste. Chantal*, ii. 21.
[2] *Œuvres*, XV. 798, p. 253.
[3] *Œuvres de Ste. Chantal*, i. 356.

CHAPTER V

The Testing of the Mother-Foundress

The guidance of Jeanne Françoise de Chantal towards that sanctity which glorified her final years was one of the great tasks entrusted to François de Sales. Her natural gifts disposed her to take keen delight in the joys this world can offer, and she found the way of renunciation in each one of its stages infinitely difficult. Moreover each stage, as it opened out before her, had an element of the unexpected. "Some day you will come to me and I shall take everything from you," so he had warned her when, in the midst of the turmoil of the world, she was longing for the cloister. In due time she came to Annecy, aflame with high desire, ready for complete submission, yet still very far from understanding of those words of his. Much ground had to be covered before, in the testing time of her Retreat in 1617, she began to understand them, and then, although her endurance seemed to be taxed to its limit, she was only taking the first steps of her journey on the Royal Road.

S. François was never more clearly the spiritual director of Ste. Chantal than when he decided that she must no longer look for his direction. Indeed, should any desire a striking instance of God's use of human agency in the training of a faithful soul it may be found in the relations of these two. She was of those for whom a moment comes when human help must be withdrawn, that, in the midst of desolation, they may know the touch of God; and the genius of François de Sales was manifested in his choice of the moment for withdrawal. The many volumes of his spiritual letters show in its perfection his capacity to guide, to admonish, and to console; it is from the records of Jeanne de Chantal that we learn of his readiness to be silent and

to stand aside. She was too near to her own memories when she committed them to writing to weigh or to compare their value, and she felt, doubtless, that the richest treasures were gathered in the five years when the new Order and its first Superior were in constant communication with the Founder; whereas for us who can regard the history as a whole the succeeding period contains what is far more precious.

The call to Lyons came in 1615, and thenceforward the Visitation became more and more identified with the great movement of religious renaissance that centred in Paris, and produced so rich a harvest of holy living and of charity in the France that knew Vincent de Paul and Louise Legras The Founders of the Visitation were astonished at the eagerness for new Foundations displayed in provincial towns near enough to Lyons to have knowledge of the experiment of the Bellecour Convent; and, inevitably, as houses and subjects increased in number, the burden of responsibility on those who governed grew weightier. Moreover, the form of the Congregation altered from the original intention unfolded to Mme. de Chantal, and by the manner of its altering the supernatural method of its growth was emphasised. Monseigneur Denis de Marquemont, Archbishop of Lyons, felt that he must improve on the design conceived to meet the needs of so remote a region as Savoy, and when the new Foundation was established in reach of his authority, he showed a tendency to take possession and to reconstruct according to his own ideas.

"I should be but a pitiful creature, should I not, if I set up myself and my own judgment as above that of others,"—such was the reply of the Bishop of Geneva to the appeal of those who loved the Order as he designed it at the beginning. He had said it must be founded in humility, and, when the occasion offered, he was ready to show in practice the theory of humility of which he had so often preached and written, even though it might involve the ruin of his most cherished scheme. If the Visitation had crumbled under the heavy handling of the Archbishop, the faith of its Founder assured him that from its dust something would spring for the fulfilment of God's purpose.

Instead of crumbling it emerged from the ordeal stronger and with richer promise, while for him the episode may be regarded as a landmark ; it gave him opportunity for a real act of submission, and served as preparation for the higher experiences awaiting him.

Mme. de Chantal suffered sharply when the guidance of the Order seemed to be slipping into the hands of the Archbishop of Lyons, and showed more disposition to protest than to submit. Her journey to Lyons marked, for the Visitation, the end of that halcyon period when all the Sisters dwelt under one roof and learnt the meaning of their vocation from the same lips ; and for her it meant the first plunge into the intricate difficulties that assail new enterprise in the way of devotion. The Visitation put out from the calm waters of its haven at Annecy into the open sea of the world, where sudden buffets and storms innumerable awaited it; and the pilot needed to be disciplined by many trials of patience and charity and fortitude. It was when she had come through the distress caused by the Archbishop's assault upon the Order that she was called upon to face the deeper and more personal sacrifice required of her during her Pentecost Retreat ; and thenceforward demands for surrender of will, some visible to all the world and some completely hidden, succeeded each other, and each one had its share in preparing her for the great surrender which left the work, begun in partnership, to her sole direction.

That sacred partnership had been her happiness and glory, and when S. François summoned her to follow him, first to Grenoble and later to Paris, to establish Houses of the Order for which his preaching had prepared the way, the eagerness of the first days in the Maison de la Galerie glowed in her again and she would have gone to him on foot rather than fail to do his bidding. And her schooling must have been the harder by reason of that eagerness. When she reached Paris, in April 1619, her skill and influence were needed to build on the foundation laid by S. François, and she had good reason to expect a renewal of the old unity of purpose and endeavour. Nevertheless, her letters, by chance phrases here and there, give sufficient indication of the change from the old conditions. While he remained in

Paris, she wrote to the Superiors at Lyons and at Grenoble : " We see him briefly and seldom." " We see him from time to time, but never so that we can talk to him. Our poor sisters have not yet been allowed that comfort, nor have I." And then—looking back when he had gone— " We had him only for a little and we rarely saw him."

This meant sharp discipline, although it was probably administered without deliberate intention. The letters of the Mother Superior show how greatly her burden of responsibility weighed upon her, and how closely she followed every detail of administration in the new Houses, far and near ; yet, behind warnings and suggestions and advice, one question is always dominant : " What would Monseigneur wish ? " And the wishes of Monseigneur were made known only at long intervals, for, while the Visitation and all that concerned the Sisters held undiminished place in his heart, an overwhelming sense that his own plans were merged in God's design had stilled his own desire to express his thoughts about them. It was part of the training of the Mother Superior that her perception of the change in him should make her only the more eager for constant communication ; more certain that the Visitation would profit by his guidance at every step. And so, whether obedience held her in Savoy, or in Paris, or in some provincial town of France, she remained always in a state of tension, waiting for word or sign from him, and never attempting to disguise that confidence and peace of mind were in his hands to give or to withhold.

A letter from Paris to Annecy in 1621, one of the very few that escaped destruction, is a help to comprehension of the final stage in his dealings with her. " Assuredly if I am delayed here," she wrote,[1] " I shall remain all the more readily because it means a great sacrifice for God, greater than you have any idea of ; for it seems to me that if either of us should die before I have confessed to you once again I shall be at the mercy of a multitude of scruples and uncertainties. But from a quiet heart I have told Our Lord that in obedience to His Will I do not wish to cherish anything whatever that concerns myself, and I confide it to His

[1] *Œuvres de Ste. Chantal*, iv. p. 568.

mercy that by His grace I may fully declare my soul before you once again. . . .

"You have no news to write about, you say? Ah! have you no words that will tell of your real self? It is so long since you have told me anything. What happiness to talk heart to heart some day!"

Surrender is intended: it had not yet become actual and, indeed, it may fairly be questioned whether she achieved even a full comprehension of the meaning of surrender until death had silenced the voice for which she longed. As he read, S. François must have realised where she stood, and, perhaps even then, he decided on the test that awaited her. Many months intervened, however, before the sorrowful hour when it was brought to bear, for they did not meet even momentarily until November 1622. Then the Bishop of Geneva, travelling in the suite of the Prince-Cardinal of Savoy, passed through Lyons on his way to Avignon, and la Mère de Chantal saw him in the Visitation parlour,[1] for just so long a space as permitted the planning of the next weeks and the arrangement of a further meeting. We have followed the history of the weeks in Lyons and his death there in December; and in the final scene Mme. de Chantal had no part. Her last experiences of him were essentially her own; he, so famed for gentleness, used her with severity, and in so doing paid tribute to potential sanctity.

She returned to Lyons with the same eagerness as had lightened the road from Dijon to Saint-Claude when, eighteen years earlier, she went thither to meet Madame de Boisy and her son. We know that the Bishop chose to lodge within the precincts of the Visitation, and so she must have had frequent opportunity of seeing him, from the moment of his arrival, and must have found delight in it; and, even though pressing business might postpone from day to day the intimate discourse she coveted, she could now be confident that such postponement was only a passing trial.

Perhaps he observed her more closely than she knew, and tried to put her on her guard, so that she might curb her own impulsive longings and relieve him from the hard

[1] *Œuvres de Ste. Chantal*, v. p. 73, *note*.

necessity of giving pain. A story of a brief interview between them, preserved in the Chronicle of the Convent at Lyons,[1] suggests that he made at least one effort to show his meaning lightly. He had seized a short interval of leisure allowed him by the august personages then in Lyons; and his lackey waited in the street, outside the entrance to the Convent parlour, to be ready to attend his master on his next visit. To beguile the time the lackey began to sing. The Bishop, seated within, interrupted the eager speech of the Mother Superior to exclaim: "My Mother, Pierre is singing!"

"Our good Mother," says the Chronicle, "continued to talk with all her wonted eagerness, and all the while the poor lackey continued to sing, unconscious that his kind master was an attentive listener. And, at last, the Bishop said again, 'My Mother, what do you say to the singing of Pierre?' And she replied:

"'My very dear lord, let us leave Pierre to his singing, and make use of this precious time.' At which our saintly Founder rose, and opened the door himself that he might better hear the lackey singing—and perhaps that he might moderate the holy zeal our saintly Mother may have displayed concerning her own spiritual state."

Although given with a smile this was a solemn warning. It was ineffective, because these two were no longer at one in understanding. And at this moment of crisis it is well to regard the true position of the Mother Superior. In the immediate past she had worked faithfully amid many hardships and continual anxieties, haunted by a growing sense of solitude; and at all times all her life and all her powers were devoted to the service of God and the interests of the Visitation. She gave without reserve and had learnt to see renunciation as a privilege, yet she had fixed desire on the obtaining of one boon: that, as a period of labour closed, she might bring her record of failure and shortcoming and mistake before the judgment that to her was final. She had come back to Lyons assured that her longing would be satisfied, and her eagerness only gained additional strength from the checks and disappointments imposed upon her.

[1] See Boulangé, T., *Le Prêtre à l'école de François de Sales*, p. 295.

At length S. François forced sufficient space amid the claims that pressed upon him and, having summoned her to the Convent parlour, announced that unbroken hours lay ahead and he and she must decide together how best to use them. It was the moment of test, and she failed to recognise it. Once more the "holy zeal" that dulled her hearing for the melody of Pierre the lackey held sway, and she snatched at the chance of spiritual comfort. She needed, desperately, sufficient time to lay bare the secrets of her soul and once again receive his counsel; and she pleaded for it. On the earlier occasion he had checked her with a smile; now he was wholly grave. "How is this," he said; "do you still wish greatly?"

And he decreed that the precious hours should be used to discuss the business of the Visitation. We are told he had premonition of his approaching death, and he may have believed this interview would be their last. If it was so he never paid her a higher tribute of respect, in all their years of friendship, than at its bitterest moment, for it was then that he set for her the standard he aimed at for himself, softening nothing, because he knew she had strength to suffer to the uttermost and to grow rich by loss. Of necessity the Mother-Foundress had to learn neither to ask nor to refuse, and because to her nature that rule was so difficult of acceptance he showed himself relentless in enforcing it.

"To find all delight in God the soul must find its only delight in Him," said S. John of the Cross. "Ah, my daughter," François de Sales had written to the Baroness de Chantal in Burgundy, "how I long that we should be altogether dead to ourselves that we may live altogether for God!" At Lyons in 1622 he seemed to have approached achievement of his longing, and she had lagged behind.

After that interview she left Lyons, at his bidding, on business for their Order; and the tidings of his death reached her before she returned to Annecy. From the threshold of the other world he had given her the hardest lesson of her life; and in the nineteen years remaining to her she proved that he had judged aright and she was able to receive it.

CHAPTER VI

The Novice in Devout Life

If the hard lesson accepted by the Mother-Foundress is regarded by itself there is risk of misunderstanding the law governing the Order of the Visitation. And if we mistake the purpose of the Visitation we shall not achieve intimate knowledge of François de Sales. Hardness for hardness' sake had no place in his teaching; and in requiring of the best-beloved of all his Daughters that she should check desire he gave her his final and most signal proof of love.

The interior life of the Visitation was to be rooted and grounded in love; to this his Daughters were to be dedicated and consecrated, so that their response to the call to suffering, in whatever form, was the joyful response of those who recognise the call of love. "For love of their Heavenly Father they shall crucify their senses, imagination, passions, dislikes, bad temper."[1] The primary motive was always to be clear before them; not for self-discipline, nor in obedience, must sacrifice be accepted, but for love, by which humiliation was transformed into honour and the bearing of hardness became a joy.

To accept a standard so high as to be beyond achievement, and always to be endeavouring to reach it, is a condition that implies suffering, and to this the true Visitation nun was committed; yet such suffering, deep and intimate though it may be, need not be subversive of interior peace. The attainment of a tranquil heart was always the first stage in the training that S. François advocated; it was a definite goal which he had set before himself in the early years of his pilgrimage, and when he set it before others

[1] *Constitutions*, No. XXXIII.

he had full knowledge of the difficulties that must be overcome.

He described,[1] in days when unconsciously he was preparing for the steep ascent that lay ahead, how once he had lain awake and "worried about something which certainly was not worth a thought," and in his simple fashion depicts his fruitless struggle against the petty cares of the moment. He said he believed his actual self was thus revealed and that his composure in face of great catastrophes "is none of my doing, it is the grace of my Saviour." From that discovery he moved slowly forward, striving for the state when grace should uninterruptedly prevail against disturbance.

When he had himself achieved tranquillity he saw that it was the essential basis for building up the life of prayer. "Nothing in this disturbs me save that I find you are disturbed," so he wrote to Mme. de Chantal, when he had been the victim of an atrocious calumny; and as he planned the future of the Order he set tranquillity of heart among the essential needs to be fulfilled. Yet his plans, however firmly based on wisdom and experience, did not move smoothly on to their fulfilment, and even in his contact with the Visitation and with the Carmelites he had dark moments of disillusion. There was a time when two of his own Daughters, Superiors of neighbouring convents, actually quarrelled over the possession of a thousand crowns, and the Founder's comment is a cry of pain: "I am able to bear all other trials, but this is beyond my endurance."[2]

And from the Carmelites, whom he held in deepest reverence, he received a blow hardly less shrewd. When the Visitation was founded at Nevers the friends of Carmel, already established there, endeavoured to restrain all possible subjects from entering the novitiate of the new House. The Founder of the Visitation was moved to put in words his own contrasting view of the true basis of the Religious Life.

He wrote from Annecy in July 1621[3]: "O my very dear Daughter, how deplorable to see the fruits of worldly

[1] *Œuvres*, XIII. 412, p. 318.
[2] *Ibid.* XX. 1940 p. 361.
[3] *Ibid.* 1808, p. 109.

wisdom in these souls of whom you write! The sense of mine and thine holds stronger dominion in things spiritual because it appears as a mine and thine of the spirit; whereas in fact it is not only natural but carnal. O how utterly opposed this all is to that pure charity which knows neither jealousy nor envy and which seeketh not her own! My Daughter, this worldliness is at variance with the quiet confidence which the children of God should feel in what Heaven provides. All this suggests that the foundation of Religious Houses and the vocation of souls is brought about by human methods; and indeed for the walls and the woodwork human method may suffice; but where vocation is concerned, or the union of the souls that are called, or the increase in their number, either the whole is supernatural or else it is entirely worthless. We bring far too much worldly calculation and human cleverness into these things which God brings about by special grace. It is those who seem to be rejected who receive blessing and increase, like Leah and Anne and the rest.

"So, my very dear Daughter, we must remain in peace, in gentleness, in humility, in love unfeigned, without murmuring against this new disturbance. O if only we could have a spirit of entire trust in the fatherly care with which God holds our Congregation we should rejoice to see the flowers become more numerous in other gardens and give God thanks as if they were in our own. For, my Daughter, how can it signify to the truly devoted soul whether the Heavenly Bridegroom is served by our means or by some other? He who seeks only to content the Beloved is content with whatever contents Him. Believe me, the good that is entirely good need fear no loss from the increase of any other good.

"Serve God faithfully and do not ask: 'What shall we eat? What shall we drink? From whence shall we get Sisters?' It is for the Master of the House to have care for this and for Our Lady Hostess to make ready; and our Houses belong to God and to the Holy Mother. For love of them, my very dear Daughter, forget these little human malpractices, and so far as it is possible inspire our dear Sisters with the real spirit of humble generosity."

We see afresh how deep a claim S. François made upon his Daughters. "Ask nothing and refuse nothing in all that comes in the Religious Life," he said [1]; "it is holy indifference which will keep you in the peace that is the gift of your Heavenly Bridegroom, and that is the only statute which I require all our Sisters to observe." Hopes and disappointments were to have no place. There must be no mine and thine, nor any desire to excel, whether as an individual or as a Community. "We must rejoice to see the flowers springing up in other gardens." "So long as God is served it matters not by whom." Unless they could rise to this their life missed its object. "The whole must be supernatural, or else entirely worthless"—that was his considered judgment on life in Religion.

Members of an Order which constantly struck its roots into new ground were obliged often to have contact with the outside world; they could not be defended from uncertainty as to ways and means, and those who held office required prudence and business capacity. All this their Founder realised, and saw in it no hindrance to their progress. He was himself busy with many affairs, and he became even busier as the years went on, and yet the cares of the world weighed on him less and less. After his embassy to Paris, amid distractions of every kind, tenfold more numerous than could assail a Visitation nun, he wrote of himself, in a sudden burst of confidence: "Of my soul I have nothing to say save only that it is more and more filled with a very eager desire to care for nothing but the love of Our Crucified Lord, and that I feel myself so steeled against the happenings of the world that hardly anything can touch me." [2]

Such detachment did not imply indifference to the griefs of others. "Believe me when you suffer I suffer with you," he had written to a friend in the world when temporal sorrows had ceased to have meaning for himself. His compassion never dwindled; but as his conviction that the purpose of God must over-rule the affairs of men grew stronger, he gave less thought to the failure or success of his own efforts. And so he added a new maxim to his store: "That which cannot be done to-day can be done

[1] *Œuvres*, XX. 1910, p. 298.

[2] *Ibid.* 1873, p. 226.

to-morrow, and what cannot be finished here will be finished in Heaven." [1]

Looking back over the record of eighteen years' unresting labour he saw it as signifying very little. He wrote, on the anniversary of his consecration [2]: "If I listened merely to my conscience this should be a day of shame, but God is good, He sees how heavy is my charge and how slight my power." He did not underrate the immense difficulty of his task, yet in his own eyes he had failed in it, and he looked forward to the government of his brother and coadjutor Jean François. "He, if I mistake not, will repair many of the blunders of my term of office. I confess to have fallen short in all things save in my reverence for it. But my brother is full of zeal, and seems to me to be just the man to restore what I have damaged." [3]

Protestations of humility found no favour with S. François, and he had reached a stage when such an avowal demanded no conflict with self-love. "The blessed humiliation of the sense of failure," about which he once talked to his Daughters,[4] had become a very real thing to him. If his projects had succeeded, even if his dearest wish had been granted and Geneva had welcomed him to his Cathedral, he would have found no source of pride in such events, having learnt to see in failure or success an expression of the Will of God. And so, even in good works, he ceased to have ambition, and while he regarded the triumph of the Calvinists could remind himself that God had permitted it and that He did all things well.[5] His desire for withdrawal resulted naturally from his admission of blindness and of impotence before the sovereign wisdom of God. And perhaps Jean François, with a mind full of plans and a spirit eager to put them into force, was actually a fitter person to conduct the work of the diocese to the general satisfaction, than a Bishop who believed that he could do more to help the sins and sorrows of the world in a lonely hermitage among the mountains, than from any centre of activity whether in Savoy or Paris.

[1] *Œuvres*, XX. 1832, p. 151.
[2] *Ibid.* 1858, p. 203.
[3] *Ibid.* 1865, p. 213.
[4] *Œuvres*, VI. *Conferences*, XIV. p. 262.
[5] *Œuvres*, XVIII. 1310, p. 8.

The last letter we possess from François de Sales to his coadjutor and successor is a precious revelation of his mind. He says,[1] writing in the summer of the year 1622 : " O how happy I shall be if, in a year or two from now, I can so divide my charge with you that I take the share of Magdalen and you that of Martha ! Not assuredly, because I desire Magdalen's as being ' the better part,' but because if I might rest a while at the feet of Our Lord, I believe there are special things I might learn which it would be very useful to set down in writing for the service of future generations."

Twenty years earlier he had been admitted to the deliberations of certain wise and holy persons because they knew he shared in their passionate desire to save souls. They had looked out upon conditions that were specially menacing to the work of the Church as a whole, besides impeding the spiritual progress of individuals, and they decided that a great effort must be made to arrest the progress of heresy and restore the practice of devotion among Catholics. With that end in view they had chosen, before sparing thought or energy to other and more obvious methods of reform, to secure a new standard and new leadership in the life of prayer.

François de Sales had passed through many experiences and gathered much knowledge since that time, but the truth revealed to him at the Hôtel Acarie had grown more and more luminous as his years advanced. He said, when he looked out with sorrow on the condition of his diocese, it was his only comfort that he could turn from it to regard the Visitation and say : " I have at least done this." [2] The thing that he had done was to establish centres for the life of prayer. He had intended, it is true, to combine active works of charity with the practice of devotion, but the life of the Visitation had been guided supernaturally, developing, even as his own interior life had done, on unexpected lines. And in that associated growth—the gradual assertion of the vocation of the Order and the deepening experience of S. François himself—there is material for reflection by those who make the processes of prayer a theme for study.

[1] *Œuvres*, XX. 1931, p. 337. [2] *Ibid.* XVIII. 1310, p. 8.

The Founder's plans for the Visitation show his belief that special conditions favour advance in the life of prayer, while by his own experience he learnt that God bestows His gift where and on whom He wills. For we must needs accept that, despite the clamour that surrounded him, the heart of S. François was supernaturally "taken from the world into God by heavenly love." [1] Yet if, as S. John of the Cross declares, the beginning of contemplation is intentness upon God, the writer of the Treatise had not lacked preparation. Gradually his mind had become saturated with reflection on the Love of God, until all he saw of the doings of men in the world about him was interwoven with his sense of the working of divine grace. In this he found a new claim on self-offering. He had to learn afresh the meaning of S. Teresa's formula for spiritual life and realise what it is to be "the slave of God." He learnt this in the final years. In the earlier time he had been a most devoted servant. Every stage of the years of service found him with fresh zest, giving all that he had to give with ever new delight. He was ready to surrender without reserve. Even the spiritual fellowship which he believed to be God's gift to him was offered constantly.

Yet there came a time when conscious surrender ceased and he made no more offerings, for the servant had changed into the slave. The most eloquent passages in the "Treatise on the Love of God" describe the self-emptying which Love demands, and these were inspired by meditation on Jesus in His Passion. As he mused on the mysteries of the Sacred Heart he was shown the distinction between the servant and the slave, the heart surrendered and the heart united.[2] The desire for God is given by the grace of God, but there may come a stage when all desire is stilled by God Himself. In such suggestions the thought of John of the Cross seems to find expression by the pen of François de Sales; and in spite of all the distraction of his active service S. François was permitted to pass on from understanding to experience. In the hope of guiding other souls, who might possess the opportunity denied to him, he wove into his Treatise a wealth of knowledge. He declared that it was none of it his own, but

[1] *Traité*, Bk. VII. ch. i.

[2] *Ibid.*, Bk. IX. ch. xvi.

all derived from books. He learnt then, while he taught, and, so learning, he reached that rapture of attention which is the privilege of the contemplative.

The revelation bestowed on him against all likelihood (as he believed) fixed his desire for his Daughters. Thenceforward they were to be wholly attentive to the Love of God. "Whoso aspires to Divine Love must devote to it all his time, all his mind, and all his heart." [1] There was to be no anxiety, no violence of effort, but the heart fixed on God must await with patience whatever it might please Him to bestow. Those who coveted the greatest gift of God might not receive it, nor was it to be won by study, nor by ascetic practice, nor by withdrawal from the world. God gave it where He pleased to such as were content—"asking nothing and refusing nothing,"—to wait upon His Will. And so all the elaborate imagery, all the erudition of the Treatise resolves itself into this simple teaching given to his Daughters, that they should imitate their Saviour on the Cross and, renouncing any desire of their own, remain intent upon the thought of God.

After a life of manifold activities the lesson he desired to instil was that of acquiescence. Many years earlier he had had vision for it, and depicted the contrast between the beginner in the way of the devout life and one who has travelled far. "Those who are newly apprenticed to the Love of God," he said,[2] "gird themselves, their mortification is such as suits them, their penitence and resignation and devotion is of their own choice, and they follow the Will of God in their own way; but the veterans suffer themselves to be girded and bound by others and accept the yoke assigned to them, and they go by the paths they would not choose. It is true of them that they stretch forth their hands; for in spite of natural repugnance they agree willingly to commands that go against their will and say that obedience is better than sacrifice: in this way they glorify God, being crucified not only in the flesh but in the spirit."

Even in such a way as he described, by constant bodily suffering and by the crossing of every inclination did

[1] *Traité*, Bk. XII. ch. iii. [2] *Œuvres*, XV. 798, p. 253.

S. François glorify God during his last year on earth. Yet in his own eyes he was never a veteran in the Love of God. As he increased in knowledge he learned more of his own ignorance.

"In the monastery of the devout life," he tells us,[1] "every one must always, in his own esteem, remain a novice, and for the whole of life be always on probation. And there can be no clearer proof that one is not merely a novice, but worthy of censure and expulsion, than to see oneself as ready for profession, for according to the Rule of this Order it is not by the taking of the vows but by fulfilling them that the Novices change into the Professed. And the vows are never fulfilled so long as there is anything further that can be done for their fulfilment. In serving God and advancing in His Love there is always more to be done until we die."

[1] *Traité*, Bk. IX. ch. vii.

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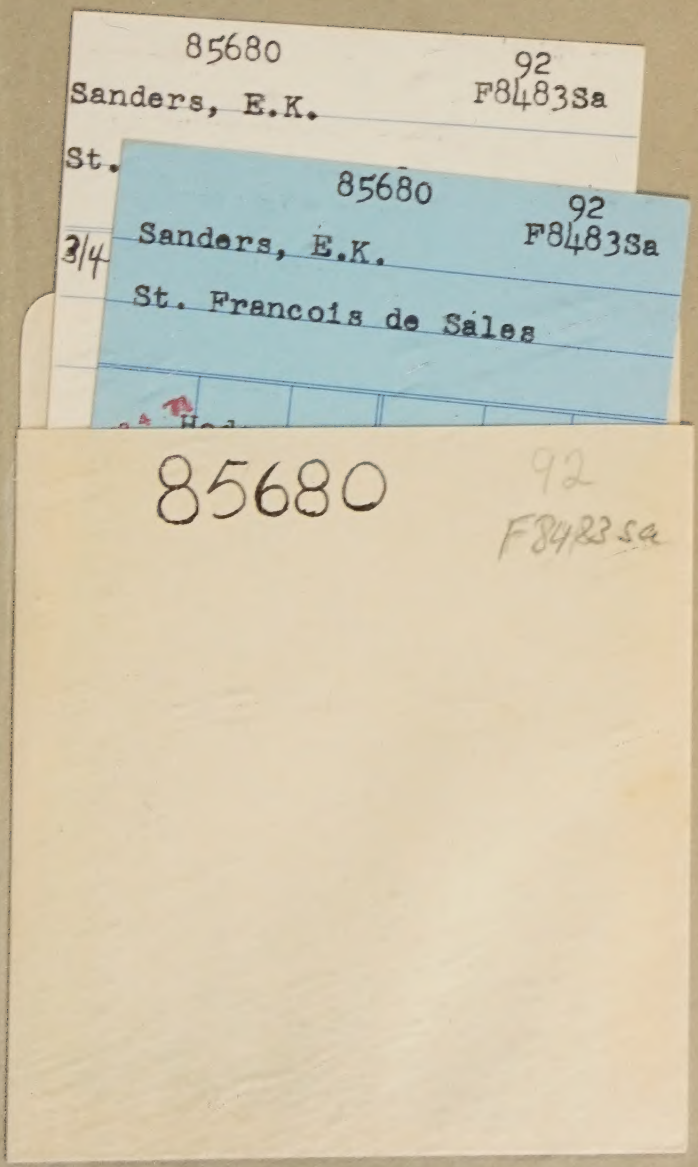
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